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THE HOLY ESTATE

VOL. II.

THE HOLY ESTATE

A Study in Morals

By

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"The Forbidden Sacrifice," also
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and

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AUTHORS' NOTE

*CHAPTERS II.-VI., VIII., XI.-XVI., and XVIII. are
written by Captain THATCHER.
The rest of the Novel is written by Mr. W. H. WILKINS.*

THE HOLY ESTATE.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WOMAN, beautiful, though her beauty had lost something of its youth's first charm, was sitting in the shady Lichtenthaler Allée of Baden-Baden one June afternoon. It was very hot though it was only June. In the streets of the town, away to the right, the heat and glare were great; the wooden shutters of the houses were closely drawn, and the shops practically deserted. Here, beneath the spreading branches of the leafy trees, all was cool and shady. The smooth, verdant lawns—Baden's chief charm—stretched away to the left bank of the Oos, and beyond it again to the terraces of the Hôtel Stéphanie. The gardens were brilliant with flowers, the fountains threw up their sparkling spray, and the lime trees, laden with bloom, swung

their fragrant censers in the warm summer air. The woman sat motionless, her hands holding a well-worn Tauchnitz novel, her eyes looking idly across the footpath at the string of carriages passing and repassing along the road.

It was the hour of the afternoon drive—the hour when the “world” of Baden, having drunk its coffee and digested its *table d'hôte*, is wont to issue forth and while away an hour or so under the branching oaks and limes and maples of an avenue more beautiful than that of any other watering-place in Europe. Nearly all Baden seemed to be on wheels to-day, and every variety of vehicle greeted the eye, from the pair-horse cab, familiar in German towns, to the dashing equipage of a great Russian prince, whose cream-coloured horses and scarlet outriders flashed by at a rapid pace. The Russians love Baden; the gilded cupolas of their temples greet the eyes to the north and to the south; the *Fremden-Blatt* bristles with the unpronounceable names and high-sounding titles of the orthodox Slavs.

The apparently endless procession rolled on. It was almost too hot to walk, but many little groups on foot were dotted about the side paths. Some

people were reading, some strolling up and down beneath the trees, most were chatting together or nodding friendly greetings. Everybody seemed to know everybody. But the woman sitting on the bench beneath the lime tree knew no one. She was alone.

It seemed strange that such a young and good-looking woman should be alone in the gay, light-hearted crowd. For she was undeniably good-looking, more so than any of those other women—fair, flaccid Germans, sallow Americans, vivacious French-women, placid English, and women of half a dozen nationalities besides, who, gorgeously arrayed, were riding by in their carriages, to see and to be seen. Hers was a face that grew on one; it was perfect in its contour and its colouring. But it was not that which drew one to her. There was a little line about the corners of the sweet mouth, a veiled sadness in the depths of the brown eyes, which spoke to a careful observer of dead hopes and past sorrows. It was this shade of sadness—a look which only comes to those who have suffered—which mutely appealed, and rounded off her beauty like a charm. It was very noticeable just now, for her face was off its guard, and her thoughts were wandering, per-

chance, back again into the past. And a careful observer might have noted, too, that the neat black dress which fitted her figure was of the cheapest material that could be bought, and that the fingers of the gloves which closed loosely around the book had been neatly darned, not once, but many times. But only a woman would have noted this; a man would simply have seen the beautiful face and the supple, graceful figure.

The rolling of the wheels went on, and the little groups on the pathways grew more numerous. But still she sat beneath the lime tree, looking straight before with eyes that saw, and yet saw not; her thoughts far away. People looked curiously at the lonely woman. Her beauty attracted notice. Two German soldiers swaggered past, and with the brutal insolence of their race, stared right into her face. She was only a woman, and unprotected. One muttered something to the other; then they laughed coarsely, and went on with clanking swords and stiff, wooden gait. A little pink flush crept into her face for a moment, otherwise, she heeded them no more than the flies buzzing out in the sunshine. Presently the clock of the Protestant Church hard by struck five. She rose from her reverie, and

with the leisurely step of one who has nothing particular to do, walked along the pathway towards the town. She was going to the milk-stall behind the Trink Halle, where every evening fresh, creamy milk was wont to be served out in slim, thin glasses by buxom dairymaids in quaint Black Forest costumes. As she came from the shade of the avenue into the glare of the open space in front of the gardens, the closing notes of the band smote upon her ears ; and, a minute later, a little crowd of people began to issue from the gates. The afternoon concert was over.

She was threading her way through the people, when suddenly she paused irresolutely. A look of recognition swept across her face, followed immediately by one of conflicting emotions, gladness annoyance, fear—all commingled. She half turned to retrace her steps, but at that moment a cheery voice cried :

“What! Madeleine—Mrs. Dampier! Who would have thought of meeting you here? Dear, I am so glad to see you once more.”

The owner of the voice was a little ruddy, bright-eyed woman of some forty-five or thereabouts, with irregular homely features, and a face beaming with

good nature—a face one could instinctively like and trust. She was unmistakably British. Her tailor-made serge and stout walking shoes settled that at once. She spoke like one who is sure of meeting a warm response, and held out both her hands.

But Madeleine—for she it was—did not respond to the greeting heartily. For a moment she looked as though she would fain run away. Her face flushed, and then faded pale. She gave her hand timidly.

“And I—I,” she said, in a hesitating manner, “did not think of meeting you here either, Mrs. Eveline.” Then, noticing the look of pained surprise which her distant words brought into the other’s friendly eyes, she continued hurriedly, “Pray pardon me, I hardly recognised you at first. It was so unexpected—so sudden—it is such a long time since we met.”

“Nearly eight years,” said Mrs. Eveline, trying to keep the disappointment, at the way in which her advances had been met, out of her voice. “Nearly eight years, and that works changes in most of us—no doubt it has worked a change in me; I am just of the age when women do

change. But you—I should have known you anywhere, Madeleine—and yet you have altered too. Why ‘Mrs. Eveline’? It used to be Anna in the old days, before you went to India,” she added reproachfully.

“Ah, the old days!” said Madeleine, and a spasm of pain contracted her face, “they seem very long ago. Are you staying in Baden?” she asked, with an abrupt change of subject.

“Yes, we arrived last night, all of us—that is the professor, Jack, and myself. We are staying at the Hôtel Victoria. Jack and my husband have walked out to the woods beyond Lichtenthal to see the Geroldsau waterfall. I meant to have gone with them, but the sun was too hot. So I thought I would come and hear the band instead. I am glad I did; otherwise I should have missed you.”

“Oh, Baden is a small place,” said Madeleine with an embarrassed little laugh, and talking fast, like one who wishes to hide her embarrassment; “we should have been sure to have met somewhere. And you have missed the waterfall! It is not much of a one, it is true; but the walk to it is lovely, and the river above is very pretty.”

“Oh, the waterfall,” said Mrs. Eveline brusquely;

“one can drive over there any day ; we shall be here for a few weeks. It is of yourself that I wish to hear. Where are you going ?” For all this time they had been standing still. “ May I walk a little way with you ?”

“ With pleasure,” Madeleine answered, but the pleasure seemed lacking in her tone. “ I was going across the gardens to get a glass of milk at the dairy. This is the time everyone goes. You should see the dairy ; it is one of the institutions of Baden.”

She seemed determined to keep the conversation on indifferent subjects.

“ And after ?” inquired her companion, as they turned into the gardens.

“ Oh, after !” wearily—“ I was going home.”

“ Home !—then you live here ?”

“ I have been living here the last eight months. I came, and having come, it was too much trouble to go away again. Yes, it is my home, I suppose,” she said, with a sad little smile. “ Anywhere is home where one pays one’s rent. At least that is the only sort of home I know.”

“ Poor thing !” thought Mrs. Eveline.

Aloud she added impulsively :

“ Come back with me, dear, and we can have a

chat together. It will be like old times. Now, do come," and she stopped short in the garden path. "I will take no refusal," anticipating the one which trembled on Madeleine's lips. "You say you have nothing particular to do—at least I gather so. Why not come and have a cup of tea with me? English tea, which I smuggled out with me. I always manage to smuggle some when I come abroad, and make a cup with a little spirit-lamp in the train. The professor says I shall get locked up one day by the authorities, and Jack says I shall set the train on fire, but neither of these things have happened so far. Now, do come," she pleaded, for Mrs. Dampier still hesitated. "I promise you we shall be alone."

It was impossible to refuse an invitation so graciously offered. Madeleine had no excuse ready. Despite her hesitation, she was not sure that she wished to offer one; it was so good to see a friend's face again, and to hear a friend's voice. Her reluctance and reserve—a reserve which comes to those who live much alone—died away. Together, they walked back through the gardens and over the bridge to the Hôtel Victoria.

"I daresay you wonder why we came to this

hotel," said Mrs. Eveline as they were ascending in the lift to the third floor ; " but the professor likes to be well away from that little smelly river. Well, here we are," she continued, opening the door of the room—a large airy sitting-room with a bow-window, which looked down upon the bronze statue of the Grand Duke Leopold, and commanded a view of the wooded hills which crowd around Baden. " It is rather high up, but with the lift one is up in a trice."

She began to busy herself by making the tea, brimming over the while with a good-natured desire to put her guest at her ease. She had a spice of feminine curiosity to hear her news.

" Do you like Baden ? " she asked presently.

" I like it ? Yes," replied Madeleine half-absently. " At least, I like it as well as any place I know. All places are the same to me now."

" Ah ! " sighed her friend, with a glance at the cheap black dress. " We have been so sorry for you, dear—more sorry than words can tell. We heard of your loss, and—"

" Say rather of my release," she interrupted quickly. " You were talking of old times just now, Anna—in the old days we used to call things by

their right names—you and I. Let us do so now."

Mrs. Eveline sighed again.

"I know—I know. That is why we have been so sorry for you. It must have been a terrible time. I wanted to come to you—to help you—to be your friend, as I always promised I would be, but you had left India. No one knew where a letter would find you. It was not my fault—really it was not; but not hearing from me, you must have thought that I had failed you."

"No," said Madeleine in a low voice, "I never thought that; at least, I think not. But I seemed to lose faith in human nature. After all, you know, I had made my bed, and therefore I had to lie on it."

"That is a hard measure—hard when dealt out to one by others, ten times harder when measured by oneself. No, Madeleine, that is not my idea of friendship. A friend should share the sorrows as well as the joys. Where does the friendship come in otherwise? But you—you hid yourself from everyone, just when you needed a friend's aid most. I had no chance of holding out a helping hand, and I wanted to help you. Why did you do it, Madeleine?"

“ Why ? ” she echoed, the barriers of her reserve breaking down. “ Can you ask me ? I felt like some wounded, hunted thing. I only wanted to creep away somewhere by myself—and die. But you do not know. None but myself can ever know. It was my fate, I suppose. No, I will not say that—that is a coward’s plea. We make or mar our own lives. It was my folly which brought about my marriage, an infatuation which, when I look back, fills me with wonder and makes me ashamed. You warned me, I remember, but I would not listen. I did not know—how was I to know ? I was innocent, or ignorant—much the same thing. I married, not knowing what marriage meant. I found out, alas ! when too late.”

She paused, overcome by the rush of bitter memories her words evoked. Her listener pressed her hand in silent sympathy.

“ Oh, Anna,” she went on presently, “ if you knew what those years in India were to me, you would understand why I want to hide myself from the world. I bore it all until my child died. Then I became indifferent; but I still bore with him—for I had vowed before God’s altar—until

he—I cannot tell it—one does not wish to speak against the dead."

She broke down ; her voice was stifled with tears.

"Poor child, poor child, do not tell me any more—if it pains you so."

"It is a relief to speak to a friend again," she said brokenly—"and you are a friend; I have always felt that. And yet—don't think me ungrateful—when I saw you this afternoon my impulse was to avoid you. I felt ashamed."

"Poor Madeleine," said Mrs. Eveline "I can understand. But, thank God, it is all over now."

"Yes, it is over; but sometimes I can hardly believe it to be so ; it seems as if I must wake up some morning and find that my brief span of liberty has been but a dream after all. I was at Elysium—up in the hills—when I heard the news of his death. I hardly know how I struggled through the months which followed. I was ill. People were very kind, and as soon as affairs were wound up, I left India. I travelled to Marseilles and drifted thence to Lucerne, and from Lucerne I drifted here."

"Where you have been ever since ?"

"Where I have been ever since ? One drifts some-

times without knowing why or wherefore. Having come to Baden, I have stayed on, chiefly because I cannot afford to travel far, and then it is cheap."

"It has not the reputation of being cheap," said Mrs. Eveline practically. "It is hardly the full season yet, but we are paying a high price for these rooms. But it is a holiday trip, and the professor does not mind," she continued, diverted for a moment from her friend's sorrows to the evergreen topic of hotel tariffs, "and we are very comfortable. But I cannot call it cheap."

Madeleine smiled at this digression. She recognised in it that odd mixture of the practical and unpractical which had been characteristic of her friend in bygone days.

"No," she said; "if one lives in the best hotels, it certainly cannot be called cheap. But I do not."

"No, of course; how stupid of me! One wouldn't if one lived here all the year round. Where do you live? You must let me come to see you—will you?"

"With all the pleasure in the world. It is not far off. I am living in the Convent of St. Vincent, in the Stephanien Strasse, just above here—'Vincen-

tius Haus,' they call it. I have been there ever since I came to Baden."

"Living in a convent!" ejaculated Mrs. Eveline, looking at her with amazement. "You don't mean to say that your troubles have made you think of turning a nun, do you?"

"You need not fear," said Madeleine with a smile. "The fact that I live in a convent means nothing more than that I live there because it is quiet and cheap. The good nuns do not worry one about one's faith: they are very good to me, heretic though I am. 'If one loves God,' they say, 'one will do His bidding.' And in that simple creed it seems to me, may be summed up all the Law and the Prophets. But I like to go to their little chapel now and again and hear their voices rising clear and sweet as they chant the *Gloria in Excelsis*. It takes one further from earth and brings one nearer heaven. And sometimes I go down to the English church on the Level, and listen to the familiar words which bring back to me again the old church at home. But I rather avoid the English colony. I prefer to be alone—at least that is what I felt until to-day. But now you have broken in upon my solitude." She laid

her hand affectionately upon her companion's arm.

"And I am very glad that I have done so," said Mrs. Eveline briskly; "solitude may be a good thing now and then, but hardly always. It is bad for man to live alone, and it is twice as bad for a woman. Now that we are here your days of solitude will be numbered, I assure you. You must see the professor and Jack. They will be delighted to meet you again. You will hardly know Jack—you haven't seen him since he was a boy, and he has grown up such a fine fellow—though perhaps I ought not to say it," she added, with a touch of maternal pride all the same. "He took his degree last term—not such a good degree as he ought to have taken, I'm afraid. The professor was much disappointed about it, but I tell him it can't be helped. Jack was always better at games than at books, and he's not the stuff of which college dons are made. I don't quite know what he will do—be called to the Bar, I suppose, though I doubt if he'll pick up any briefs. Everybody likes him. You must see him and judge for yourself—a mother is apt to magnify her geese into swans, especially if she has only one."

The two sat talking until the lengthening shadows of the maple trees outside warned Madeleine that it was time to be returning home. Mrs. Eveline let her depart at last, after a promise to meet again on the morrow.

She went down to the door of the hotel with her and stood there watching until the slender figure in the black dress disappeared around the corner of the Sophien Strasse.

CHAPTER XX.

“It makes my heart ache to think of it ; I haven’t slept a wink all night,” cried Mrs. Eveline, with an energetic clatter of the coffee cups.

She and the professor were sitting at breakfast the morning after her meeting with Madeleine. The windows were wide open to the sunny air, and through them floated the distant music of the band as it played the morning programme to the visitors at the Trink Halle. The professor had just returned from taking his matutinal glass of water.

“I quite agree with you, my dear—quite,” he said abstractedly, without looking up from his letters. The professor was a patient man, otherwise his wife’s remark might have palled on him. She had said the same thing, with variations, over and over again at intervals during the last twelve hours. “But,” he added mildly, “I do not see what could have been done in the matter. She would marry the man, you know—and when a wilful woman

makes up her mind, no power on earth will stop her."

"Someone should have interfered. It was too bad to let her throw herself away on a scoundrel like Wortley Dampier. Her father, poor man, had no more knowledge of the world than—than," casting about for a comparison, "the general run of country parsons. Someone should have interfered," repeated Mrs. Eveline doughtily. "If nothing could be done to stop the marriage, at least someone might have helped her afterwards, when we heard how things were going."

"I do not quite see," said the professor again, "who was to interfere. Her father was dead. She was in India. And for an outsider to meddle between husband and wife is very dangerous, and very thankless too. It is playing with fire. I should be very reluctant to do it myself—under any circumstances."

"Oh, you men are always so cautious," cried Mrs. Eveline, with a shake of the head. "And, of course, you always try to find excuses for the husband. The fact of her being the man's wife did not give him the right to treat her as he did. She wasn't a slave, sold body and soul. I did not realise that

things were so bad—not that she said much, but one can tell how she has suffered by the change in her. She is not like the same woman, so pale, so subdued, so different from the bright, high-spirited girl she was before she went to India—she is another being; all the freshness of her life has been crushed out of her."

Mrs. Eveline unfolded her serviette and sadly contemplated the coffee-pot. The thought of Madeleine's wrongs seemed to have taken away her appetite. The crisp roll and golden-hued honey lay untasted on her plate.

"Let us hope she will get over it," said the professor cheerfully. "She is young yet, and at that time of life troubles are easily forgotten. There is no one more likely than a beautiful young woman to find a consoler." Then he abruptly changed the subject. "Dear me, Anna, why is it these Germans can never cook an egg? Yesterday it was raw; to-day it is as hard as a bullet. They seem incapable of understanding that there is such a thing as a *via media*."

"They are like I am, I suppose," said his wife. "You always say that I have no middle distance."

But she promptly rang the bell, scolded the waiter, and ordered a fresh supply, which she boiled herself by means of her spirit-lamp. They might spar a little sometimes, but she was attentive to her husband's wants.

"Where is Jack?" queried the professor presently. "He went out before seven o'clock this morning. Did he tell you he wouldn't be home to breakfast?"

"Not a word—he'll be in presently, I expect. He is probably loitering in the gardens with Mimi Van Wart—at least, that is where I left him. What a nice girl she is! It is such a pity that she goes in for such extravagant ideas. But I suppose it is only a passing phase."

"Ah!" said the professor absently. Then he added, as though he were speaking of some newly-discovered insect, "She has certain peculiarities of speech and manner which are new to me. At least, I do not remember having noticed them in a young girl before. And her views are those of a new species of woman, that is true; but she is an American, and that explains much."

Professor James Eveline, F.R.S., was professor of entomology at the University of Cambridge. He

had been employed on divers investigations, and had written a compendious work upon the insects of South America. Thus it will be seen that he was a very distinguished man in his particular way. But outside of it he was not distinguished at all, except for his devotion to the wife of his bosom. She led him, so to speak, by the nose, and though he sometimes debated her theories, he always did what she wished him to do. He was a short man, with stooping shoulders and a gray beard and spectacles. He had a way of looking at people through his dim, short-sighted eyes, as if he were apparently grouping and classifying them. But it was only apparently so; in reality the human race interested him not at all. So long as he was left to his *musca* and his *scaraboeni* he was perfectly happy.

His wife was quite different. She knew nothing about flies or beetles, but was intensely interested in her fellow creatures. Their union was an admirable example of how excellently well people of totally dissimilar tastes can get on together. She was the complement of himself; she supplied all the qualities in which he was lacking.

Mrs. Eveline had been a great friend of Madeleine's

in Cornwall, before the professor had settled permanently at Cambridge, and was living in the adjoining village to that of which Madeleine's father was the rector. Mrs. Eveline was some fifteen or twenty years older than Madeleine, and that had given her a sort of motherly influence over the motherless girl.

She had been powerless to stop the marriage, and after it was accomplished she had been powerless to intervene, for Madeleine and her husband had passed beyond her ken. From time to time tales reached her ears of Captain Dampier's exploits in India. Then she heard of his death, and strove to find Madeleine, but without success—until yesterday.

The problem now was, how she could help her?—or rather, how best she could veil her help?—for Mrs. Eveline knew that her sensitive nature would make such help very difficult. She was pondering over this now, but the current of her thoughts was interrupted by the advent of her son.

Jack Eveline burst into the room. He seemed to bring with him a glow of the sunshine outside. There was a breezy vitality about everything he did. He was a typical young Englishman, healthy and strong-limbed, with a well-knit frame and

frank, pleasant face, honest, open-hearted as the day.

"I have been for a swim," he said. "There's a place up the river beyond the tennis ground—not bad considering all things—but a long way off—longer than I thought, that's why I'm late."

Then he fell to and attacked his breakfast with a vigour.

"By the way, what are you going to do, to-day?" he asked presently. "You are not wanting me for anything special, are you? I hope not, because Miss Van Wart has asked me to ride with her to Ebersteinburg. There are ruins there, or something of the kind. We are going to meet some people there at luncheon and ride home after. I voted for going in the evening, because I am told the ruins, like Melrose, should be seen by moonlight. But Miss Van Wart didn't seem to see it, so we are going this morning. It will be jolly hot, though," he added, with a glance through the window at the sun-baked Platz below.

"I don't think it would be much use if we did want you," replied Mrs. Eveline, smiling; "your day seems to be pretty well mapped out already. I thought it might be, and so we have made our

arrangements quite independently of you. Your father has his 'cure-bath' at eleven o'clock, and in the afternoon he is going with Professor Von Müller to see the experiments in fish-culture at Lichtenthal—and I? I am going to see an old friend whom I met yesterday. I will tell you all about her later."

The day wore itself on, but it was not until the afternoon, after seeing her husband trundle off with his co-professor in a queer Baden waggonette, that Mrs. Eveline found herself free to go and see Madeleine. She walked up the street at the back of the Hôtel Victoria in quest of the Convent of St. Vincent.

It was not long before a large board, with "Vincentius Haus" painted thereon, caught her eye, and, turning in through the iron gates, she found herself in a wide space, with tubs of oleander trees covered with a mass of pink bloom on either side. There was not a soul in sight; in point of fact nearly everyone was indulging in a siesta after the mid-day meal, and there did not appear to be any bell or means of communication. She made her way up to a square court planted around with linden trees. There she saw, coming down the steps of the chapel, a little dark-eyed

nun, who asked her in the tongue of Southern Germany what it was she wanted.

Mrs. Eveline did not know a word of German, but she guessed the purport of the question, and explained that she had come to see Mrs. Dampier.

“Ah, Mrs. Dampier,” smiled the nun; “I will take you to her.”

At least she said this in German, and conveyed her meaning in a series of gestures. Mrs. Eveline followed her up the steep garden path at the back of the chapel. A very large and fertile garden it seemed to be. Great blossoming bushes of roses grew side by side with the vegetables, and the currant bushes and cherry trees were laden with fruit. It was quite a pull up the hill to the square house at the top, the wooden shutters of which were closely drawn against the sun.

“Mrs. Dampier is here,” said the nun, throwing open the door of a room on the ground floor.

The room was scrupulously clean and neat. One might have eaten one’s dinner off the polished floor. There was a white bed in one corner, a wardrobe in another, a few wooden chairs and a table. That was about all. But there were evidences of refine-

ment, little feminine touches here and there, a bunch of roses in a brown jug, a few water colours on the walls, books, a work-basket, and such like.

Mrs. Eveline had scarcely time to take in these details, for the closed shutters plunged the room in semi-twilight, when Madeleine came into the room from the balcony outside, and greeted her warmly.

“I think I must have been asleep like everyone else,” she apologised, “or I should surely have seen you coming up the garden. Shall we come outside?” She led the way into the vine-clad balcony. “It is shady here.”

They seated themselves in the verandah, and looked out through the leafy screen at the pine-clad hills, at the gilded cupola of the Russian church flashing in the sun, and upon the red-tiled roofs of the town beneath.

“And this is your home,” said Mrs. Eveline. “What a lovely view.”

“Yes, and an ever-changing one; quite worth the climb, I think. See,” she said, talking fast on irrelevant subjects, to cover her uneasiness, “there is the summer palace of the Grand Duke, and that orange and red flag floating on the ramparts means that the Court is here. The Grand Duchess comes

here sometimes to see the nuns ; she is universally beloved."

"It is very nice," said Mrs. Eveline, vaguely looking around her. She wasn't in the least interested in the Grand Duchess, but very much in Madeleine ; and she noticed with a pang the evidences of poverty in the barely furnished room. "But it must be rather cold in winter."

Madeleine laughed.

"You are very practical, Anna. It isn't the cold one minds in winter—but the gloom. On bright days it is well enough, but when the rain comes, and the vine leaves fall, and the mists shut out the hills—ugh !—" she gave a little shudder, "it is very dreary. But here comes Sister Castolina with the coffee," as a bright-eyed nun brought a tray out on the balcony.

"What a smiling little creature," exclaimed Mrs. Eveline, when the nun had gone away. "She would almost reconcile me to living here. But it must be very dull to be alone always. Do you never go away ?"

"Go away ?" echoed the other a little bitterly. "How can I go away ? But you do not understand." Then with a sudden change of voice she

continued, " You are my friend, Anna ; I will be frank with you. I could not go away even if I wished to do so, because I cannot afford it. One lives here for very little, incredibly little, it would seem to you—but one must have that little, or one cannot live. The nuns are very kind, but they are poor too. I am not of their Order ; I am not even of their faith. They do everything they can for me, but they must be paid ; and when I have paid them there is nothing left."

She looked straight before her ; her voice was absolutely unemotional. It was not a new problem to her.

" Why did you not tell me before ? " cried her warm-hearted friend. " What must you have suffered ? Let me help you."

Madeleine's face flushed at the suggestion. " You help me by coming to see me."

" But, dear, you cannot go on like this. Money is an odious thing ; but one cannot live without it. What is to be done if you will not let anyone help you—materially, I mean ? "

" Not in that way. I do what I can. I give lessons in English, when I can find any pupils ; but," with a wan smile, " I have never found but

one or two. I am no match for the professionals, and then the Germans pay so little, only 50 pfennings a lesson—sixpence an hour; and one has to make so many sixpences to pay one's week's lodgings."

Here she broke down altogether.

"I have worked and struggled so hard," she continued presently—"so hard, and always this dreadful loneliness; and every day makes it worse and worse. It is death in life—worse; for in death, at least, there is oblivion."

"You shall bear it no more," said Mrs. Eveline stoutly. "If you will not let me help you in one way, you must in another. You must come and live with us, and make our home your home. I wish it—we all wish it. Now, Madeleine, do be reasonable, come away with us when we leave Baden?"

But Madeleine only shook her head, and looked at the hills.

"I cannot bring you the burden of my troubles. I cannot break in upon your home life. You do not know me as I am now. I must 'e'en dree my wierd.' I might, perhaps, have found employment before; but—call it false pride if you will—I shrank from appealing to anyone. I could not do

so without telling them of the past, and I could not do that. But now that you know all, perhaps you might find someone who would give me work; that is all I want—work, hard work, to help me to forget. If you wish to help me, this is the only way."

"I will find that way before long," said Mrs. Eveline. And she meant it.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. EVELINE was not the woman to let the grass grow under her feet. She wrote round promptly to her kinsfolk and acquaintance. She ruined herself in foreign postage stamps, and she greatly bored the professor, who plaintively remarked that his wife seemed suddenly to be smitten with the *cacoethes scribendi*. Beyond that she accomplished little. She did not find it by any means so easy to obtain employment for her friend as she had supposed. Nobody seemed in want of Mrs. Dampier's services, either paid or unpaid, a fact which was not extraordinary, since there are many women and few vacancies.

Mrs. Eveline was in despair. She seemed powerless to help in the only way in which Madeleine would allow herself to be helped. The days went by, and still she had no news.

At last, when she had almost given up hope, a letter came from a Mrs. Abington, a friend of hers,

saying that she was parting with the lady who had been her companion, and that she should be pleased to see Mrs. Dampier. Perhaps she would come to stay with her for a month, and then, if they suited one another, she would be glad if she could remain altogether. They could settle all details later on.

Mrs. Eveline was overjoyed when she read the letter, and immediately communicated its contents to her husband and son.

“It is the very thing,” she cried. “I only wrote to Gertrude Abington on the off chance. How fortunate! She is a dear woman, and I am sure that Madeleine will be happy with her.”

The professor echoed his wife’s satisfaction. The epidemic of letter writing would now cease.

“I am awfully glad—that is since you are,” said Jack. “Mrs. Dampier is simply stunning; far too good to be a companion to a crotchety old woman, I should have thought—though Mrs. Abington seems less crotchety than the ordinary run of old women. By the way, where’s Mrs. Abington’s son now? He was shooting big game in the Rockies when I last heard of him. I suppose he’s away still. They might make a match of it, you know.

The old dowager doesn't know what a pretty woman Mrs. Dampier is. It's rather risky, I guess."

"Guess!" echoed Mrs. Eveline; "how horribly Yankee you are getting, Jack. Don't pour cold water on my schemes. I am sure Mrs. Abington is a most kind-hearted, sensible woman; such an idea would never enter her head, and as for her son, he's travelling round the world somewhere; he hasn't got over the way that girl in India treated him. But I can't stop here all day; I must be off and tell Madeleine the news."

"Don't forget our excursion to the old castle this afternoon," cried Jack, as his mother was leaving the room; "we start at four o'clock sharp, from the *Hôtel de l'Europe*; and bring Mrs. Dampier with you; don't forget. Well, I must be off too. By Jove! father," hitting at the flies which buzzed around him, "you may say this is a bad place for insects if you like, but there are plenty of the *musca domestica* anyway."

Mrs. Eveline hurried up to the convent; but early as it was, Madeleine had gone out.

"She has gone to the woods by the Russian church," said the porteress. "If you turn up the

Michaelsburg, you will be sure to find her. Oh! it is not so far."

Mrs. Eveline posted off at once. It was a pretty long walk on a hot day, but by-and-by she came across the object of her quest. Madeleine was sitting under a tree, sketching. The roses which clambered luxuriantly up the trunks of the trees, a way they have at Baden, made a glowing background of colour. At the sound of footsteps she looked up, and rose to greet her. There was a questioning look in her eyes.

"I have good news for you at last," cried Mrs. Eveline breathlessly. "Let us sit down, and I'll tell you all about it. What a climb it is up this path." She proceeded to tell her the contents of her letter.

Madeleine listened in silence to the end. A mist swam before her eyes for a moment. Then she turned to her friend.

"I can never thank you enough," she said brokenly, "never. But you, I am sure, will understand all I have said. You have saved me from—from myself."

To Madeleine, Mrs. Abington's letter came like a breath from another world. The offer was not a magnificent one, but all things are comparative, and

she had suffered many things from the world's hardness and meanness since we left her that night at Elysium. She would be in England again, that dear land to which the exile—whether the exile be self-created or not—turns ever and anon with longing eyes. The sun seemed to have brightened to her, the scent of the roses to be more fragrant. Such a little thing had happened, and yet it made so great a difference to her life.

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About half-past four in the afternoon a merry party was driving up the steep winding road which led through the forest to the old schloss, whose ruins, rugged and massive, look down upon Baden. It was a beautiful drive, past the blossoming gardens of the new palace, past the statue of the marble Christ, whose exquisite beauty brought tears to the eyes of the sceptic Schuster, past cherry orchards, where the coral fruit now hung ripe on the trees, through verdant meadows, where the haymakers were gathering in the fragrant yield, and patient oxen drew their burdens home. Then into the forest, where the great pine trees stood like tall sentinels on either side, their thick branches

meeting overhead and shutting out every ray of the sun. The huge masses of rock known as the Battert frowned down from above. Here all was grand, mysterious in its solitude and its silence.

The professor and Mrs. Eveline, Mrs. Zebedee P. Stork of Chicago, Mimi Van Wart's "sheep-dog" (for she was not sufficiently emancipated to do without that concession to conventionality), and Madeleine, rode in one carriage. Mimi Van Wart, Jack Eveline, and a puffy little German baron followed in another. They were all in the best of spirits except Jack, whose brightness had suffered a temporary eclipse in consequence of the smiles which the volatile Mimi was lavishing on the German baron. That young lady seemed to take a positively malicious delight in raising jealous fires in Jack's eyes. She snubbed him unmercifully, and hung on each word which fell from the baron's lips as though it were the utterance of the most profound wisdom. That morning she and Jack had a discussion about the emancipation of women, and Jack, man-like, had laid down certain very definite rules as to what his ideal woman ought to do, and what she ought not to do. Mimi translated, and not without reason, his ideal woman to

mean herself. And, as she had her own ideas as to the freedom and independence of her sex, she resented his dictatorial tone accordingly.

“From Scylla to Charybdis,” growled Jack under his breath, his thoughts reverting to the morning’s skirmish. “Talk about Englishmen and the independence of woman! Why, the German husbands are awful brutes; they turn their wives into the kitchen, and think that is all they are good for.”

“I don’t think so,” retorted Mimi. “They have just elegant manners, which is more than can be said of most men,—specially Britishers,” she added with a toss of her pretty head. “I know one who has no manners at all.”

She followed up this unkind cut by bestowing another of her sweetest smiles on the baron, and asking him to change places with her—a feat which he performed with some difficulty, for the carriage was narrow, and he was stout. He was atrociously dressed, after the manner of German men out of uniform, in a flaring necktie, a white waistcoat, a black tail-coat, and a straw hat. But he made himself as agreeable as he knew how to do—that is to say, he paid some florid compliments in broken English, and ogled in a way which he thought no

woman could withstand. The coffers of the Von Reichel's sadly needed replenishing, and the beautiful American was wealthy.

Jack looked on, disgusted.

"It is astonishing how Americans, who call themselves the most democratic people in the world, run mad after titles," he thought to himself. "If it wasn't for his little trumpery title she wouldn't so much as look at him."

He was wrong, as men generally are about women.

They arrived at the battlemented entrance-gate of the old castle presently. The castle was a fairly well preserved ruin—as ruins go. A great part of it had been destroyed, but the outer walls, two or three ivy-clad gateways, and the keep, were standing, and the central tower was almost perfect. But the roof of the great banqueting hall, once the scene of hard-drinking bouts of freebooting German princes, had fallen in, and the refectory—so time changes all things—had long ago been given over to an enterprising Baden restaurateur, who was doing a roaring trade.

The whole party started to explore the castle together, first doing the rooms below, and then mounting the stone stairs which led to the ram-

parts. There were no fees, no guides, no vexatious restrictions as there are at Heidelberg, for instance. Each one was free to wander whither he wished, but most people, when they arrived on the ramparts, were content to rest there and wander no more.

It was a beautiful day. A little breeze was stirring, just sufficient to awake faint weird melodies from the *Æolian* harps, which, with an innate sense of the fitness of things, the castle authorities had caused to be placed in one or two of the dismantled windows of the tower. Beyond the pine and chestnut trees, beneath the ramparts, Baden was seen, stretched out in miniature at the foot of the hill, and beyond it again, far up the valley of the Rhine, the great river itself wound like a silver streak across the plain. Up here, in the warm clear air, the world's worries seemed far away.

They seemed so to Madeleine as she stood on the ramparts with Mrs. Eveline. Everything was practically arranged. She was to travel back to England with the Evelines next week, and go from their house to Mrs. Abington.

The professor and Mrs. Zebedee P. Stork were below. He was explaining to her the points of a

fine specimen of the *bombylius medius* which he had captured.

The other, and more adventurous spirits, had wandered further afield. Mimi, and her two attendant swains, went up to the highest point of the tower to view Baden from the flagstaff. It was easy work for Mimi and Jack, but the baron suffered many things as he toiled, puffing and blowing, up the tortuous winding stairs, determined not to be outdone by the "Englander," but inwardly cursing his luck which led him on such a wild-goose chase.

"Rather pumped, eh, baron?" asked Jack cruelly, when they arrived on the summit, looking at the wheezy, perspiring little German. He hadn't turned a hair himself.

The baron glared, but made no answer. He did not understand the idiom, but he imagined that it meant something offensive.

"Really! why there's the Mecuriusberg!" cried Mimi, pointing to a tall conical-shaped mountain which rose abruptly out of the plain, "and see—that dim line of smoke just imaginable on yonder horizon—I guess that's where Strasburg ought to be. Well this beats Boston. Baron, how could

the Margraves of Baden have chucked this fine situation to build that old hen-house of a palace down in the town? Here they might have had a squint at the whole of their Grand Duchy—monarchs of all they surveyed. If I were the Grand Duke I should just fix up this old castle in its pristine splendour."

"It would cost moch moneys," replied the German practically.

He was ruefully regarding his over-tight boots, and devoutly wishing that the descent down that broken stairway were safely over.

"Money—money!" cried this daughter of dollars with the supreme contempt of one who has never known what it is to be without them. "It seems to me that everything is a question of dollars nowadays. Well, we should soon fix it up if we had it over in Chicago, you bet."

"Dollars are necessary where building operations are concerned," said Jack. "It would cost a pretty penny to put this old rookery in order."

"Why, certainly. But it ought to be done all the same," said Mimi, sticking to her point. "But you men haven't an ounce romance in you—either of you. I guess I might just as well have come up

here with a couple of globe-trotting storekeepers. I'm going down again."

With a contemptuous wave of her parasol she ran down the winding stair, followed by Jack, and, more leisurely, by the Baron.

"Ah! there are some of those pretty pink flowers I want so much," she exclaimed, when she stepped out on a broad space above the so-called rittersaal. "Wait a jiff, and I'll hook some off with my parasol."

"Surely you are not going there," cried Jack. "It's awfully dangerous; there's no railing or anything."

"I bet I am," rejoined Mimi mischievously, leaping on the ledge as she spoke. "Are you coming along, baron?" But the baron declined to come along; he had had quite enough exercise for one afternoon, and not even an American heiress would tempt him into such perilous paths. He looked at her with stolid amazement, and taking out a pocket-handkerchief, mopped his heated brow.

"If you'll only wait a minute I'll get it for you," cried Jack again in alarm. "Miss Van Wart—Mimi—come back! Hang it! I forbid you to go."

But the wilful girl waved him off, and ran, light as a lapwing, along the treacherous ledge.

There was a cry, a shout, a noise of falling stones, and a cloud of dust. When it had cleared away, Mimi was discovered clinging to a giant stem of ivy some five feet lower down, which she had managed to catch hold of in her fall. A great mass of stone-work had given way beneath her feet, and hurled itself down into the ravine below. She was clinging fast to the ivy, and struggling frantically to gain a footing in the broken stone-work of the wall.

“Gott in Himmel!” ejaculated the baron, peering hopelessly over the edge.

Jack looked at him with contempt. “Run down—if you can run—and get a rope,” he cried excitedly. “Don’t stand staring there like a stuck pig. Mimi,” he shouted, “hang on a minute longer, and I’ll climb down and help you!”

“I’ll try!” she panted.

Her face, upturned to his, was white with terror.

Slowly and carefully Jack began his descent. His athletic training stood him in good stead. The greatest care was necessary. Many of the stones gave way beneath his feet, but the great boughs of

ivy helped him here and there. At last he reached the place where Mimi was clinging, her strength well-nigh spent. He wound his arm around her, and supported them both, partly by thrusting his feet into the broken stonework of the wall, and partly by hanging on to the ivy with his disengaged hand.

He shouted aloud for help.

They were only a minute or two thus, but each minute seemed an eternity. Death sudden and awful was staring them in the face. The ivy groaned and bent, but it was tough with the growth of centuries, and did not give way. Had it done so they would have been dashed to pieces.

There came a clatter of many feet, an answering shout from the wall above, and a rope noosed lasso-wise was flung over the side. Somehow or other he never knew how, Jack made the loop fast around the girl's waist, and she was slowly pulled up to a place of safety. A minute later, and he too was out of danger.

His first thought was for Mimi, who had borne up pluckily all through. But now that the danger was over, the revulsion of feeling was too great. She had fainted.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE following evening there was a concert and illumination in the gardens. Lines of light, bands of colour, ran around the grounds; in every shrub and every tree were Chinese lanterns, orange, red—all hues commingled. The band played its choicest music, and the gardens were thronged with visitors. All Baden was there, and among the crowd were the Evelines, Mrs. Zebedee P. Stork, and Mimi.

Jack and Mimi dropped behind the others; she was in a very different mood to-day compared with yesterday. The German baron was ignored, and her manner was singularly quiet and subdued. When she found herself alone with Jack, in place of the usual sparrings, arguments, sallies and banter, she had only monosyllables. A new-born shyness had fallen upon her; there was something she wished to say, but she knew not how to say it.

She said it at last. They had wandered a little way under the lime trees.

It was a corner of the gardens which, by accident or by design, had not been illuminated. The crowd were all with the lights yonder, or gathered around the bandstand. Here they were alone, and there was no light save the light of the stars. Her voice trembled as she broke in upon one of the commonplaces Jack was coining to prevent the very words which now came to her lips.

“I have not thanked you for all you did yesterday,” she said tremulously, her eyes shining with a soft, wistful light. “You saved my life, which I risked through my own wilfulness—and, what was worse, I risked yours as well. What must you think of me? I asked Mrs. Stork to thank you—but that was not enough—I must try to do so myself; but I—”

“Don’t say another word,” cried Jack, his boyish face flushing. “What I did was nothing at all—at least, nothing more than any man would have done under the circumstances. The fact of having been some little service to you is sufficient thanks in itself. Don’t you know that? You ought to know it by this time.”

Mimi turned her face up to his in the dim light. Her eyes were full of unshed tears. The band was playing some sugary-sweet German waltz, which floated to the fragrant darkness here. She waited for a minute without speaking. Then she said again in a low voice :

“ You risked your life for mine, one can’t do more than that. How can I thank you for it ? ”

“ There is one way, only one,” he said softly “ Mimi dear—I don’t want to take an unfair advantage of you—I know just now you very likely think me a much better fellow than I am, because of—of what happened yesterday ; but if you could get to care for me just a little, I think I should be the happiest fellow in the whole world. Do you think you could, dear ? ”

Her face was turned away from him. Her heart leapt, but she did not speak.

“ Do you think you could ? ” he repeated. “ Just a little.”

“ No,” she said in a whisper ; “ I can’t.”

He drew himself up, like one who tries to rally a blow. The colour faded out of his face.

“ Well, then,” he said presently, in a choked

voice, "there is nothing more to be said, I suppose."

And as he spoke he half-turned away.

"Jack—dear Jack!" she cried, holding out her hands. "Oh, you great stupid, Jack. What do you think I mean? I can't get to care for you a little—I can't, indeed—because—I surmise I already care for you too much—more than I like to own even to myself—I—"

There was no need for more. His arms were round her; his kisses stopped her lips. She finished the sentence on his breast.

How sweet the scent of the linden bloom was then, how bright the stars, how exquisite the purple twilight of the night. Ah, First Love! thou comest once, and never again. Those who have not known thee have not lived, and those who have known thee have not lived in vain.

Beyond where the lights were shining the band was playing *Treue Liebe*. In those moments of silent passion they heard it not. They were only moments, after all. With a sudden movement Mimi freed herself from his embrace.

"But I didn't say I would marry you, Jack," she said, with a quick change of manner. "I

must have a real serious talk with you first. Not now; I must sleep on it. Let's go back to the others. And come round and see me in the morning."

He had perforce to do as she wished; not another word could he get out of her on the subject.

"In the morning," she said, with shining eyes, as they parted for the night.

* * * * *

Immediately after breakfast next morning, before the dew had dried on the grass, Jack rushed off to the Hôtel de l'Europe. He had hardly slept a wink all night, and had passed the hours in alternate fits of joy and perplexity. He was bursting to confide in someone; but Mimi, with what seemed to him a gratuitous waywardness, had strictly forbidden him to breathe a word until she should see him in the morning. Everything hung upon the interview in the morning. After those few yielding moments under the lime trees, she had donned a distant air, which puzzled him sorely. Why on earth she should rush from heat to cold in that way he was at a loss to imagine? Perhaps it was a form of maiden coyness.

His pulses thrilled at the remembrance of those delicious moments when she nestled to his breast under the limes. The fragrance of the lime flowers in the Platz smote upon his senses as he went along, and reminded him of the warm contact of her lips in the soft darkness. The scent of the linden bloom would always remind him of her while life lasted.

He sprang up the stairs of the Hôtel de l'Europe three at a time.

In the first-floor corridor, outside the door of Mimi's sitting-room, he met Mrs. Stork of Chicago in an elaborate bath-cloak, about to repair to the bad-haus.

She looked at Jack's flushed and eager face, and greeted him with an odd smile.

"Well, really, Mr. Jack," she exclaimed, "this is an early visit. But Mimi's ready for you; you'll find her just inside. She was up with the worm, fixing up her points. I guess she'll give you an eye-opener. She's got bitten with a new crank. But don't you mind. It's only her way."

And nodding encouragingly to him, Mrs. Stork went downstairs, leaving Jack bewildered at this oracular utterance.

He was more bewildered when he got inside.

Mimi was sitting at her writing-table in the large bow-window. She got up when he came in, and waved him to sit down. She looked so distractingly pretty and fairy-like in her pale blue morning dress, and blushed so daintily withal, that he ignored the gesture, and advanced with radiant face and outstretched arms.

"No, you don't," she said, adroitly evading his embrace; "not just yet, anyway. Sit way over there, please. I've something to say to you first."

She pointed to a chair in a distant corner of the room.

"Oh! hang it, Mimi, it's so far off," remonstrated Jack, looking at her with longing eyes.

"You just sit down," she rejoined, with a stamp of her tiny foot, "or else I shall go out of the room altogether."

The crestfallen Jack obeyed. He was somewhat cheered by noticing that a Maréchal Niel rose, presumably from the bunch he had sent her, nestled at her throat, and that, despite her firmness, her lip was quivering. "What on earth is she up to now?" he thought, and he edged a little nearer.

Mimi didn't notice the movement. She was searching for something among her papers. Jack

brought his chair closer still. He noticed that, despite her business-like preparations, she seemed at a loss how to begin.

"Have you read these?" she asked abruptly at last. She took up two brown-covered books from the table, and handed them to him almost defiantly.

Jack read their titles with a puzzled air.

"*A Plain Hand-book of Human Physiology*," he said aloud. "*Problems of the Marital Relation*. Well, 'pon my word! No, I don't remember to have read them, and, if you'll allow me to say so, I think you had better not read them either."

"Why?" she flashed.

"Well, I hardly think they are the books for—" he bit his lips. "I mean, they are medical books, you know, and that sort of thing; one can hardly discuss them with an innocent girl."

"But that is just the point I want to discuss with you," she said eagerly; "innocence is not ignorance, nor ever will be. Please dismiss from your mind that I am innocent in that sense. I know all about physiology and what marriage means."

"You know more than I do, then," said Jack bluntly, "or the text-books either, I expect. Now,

don't get angry, Mimi—I know you have new ideas and all that, but, really—I'm old-fashioned enough to prefer that a girl should talk over these sort of things with her mother, don't you know ? ”

“ I haven't got a mother,” rejoined Mimi, “ and if I had, I doubt if she would tell me. Mothers often let their girls marry in ignorance. Now, I've found out for myself. The squaw theory of matrimony won't suit me.”

“ Evidently not,” said Jack drily.

“ And,” she continued, going on with her screed, “ if these matters were talked over, before marriage, by the two people concerned, a lot of the misery afterwards would be avoided.”

“ But it would rub all the bloom off; destroy all the romance,” objected Jack uncomfortably.

“ Romance,—rubbish ! ” rejoined the Transatlantic maiden. “ Romance in courtship is all very well, but we want more chivalry in marriage. Suppose we freeze on the point. You made me a proposal. Before I accept it, I think we should understand one another—that's why I sent for you this morning. I hardly know who I should be frank with, unless it is the man who I'm thinking is to be my husband.”

“ Then you really mean ‘ yes,’ Mimi ? ” cried Jack,

springing up, radiant, oblivious of everything else.

Mimi retreated behind the table, and waved him off with crimsoning cheeks.

"I said I'm thinking about it; I didn't say I would; it will depend on how you answer two questions. Of course I'm thinking of it," she reiterated gravely, rebuking his impatient exclamation. "Do you think I should talk straight like this otherwise? Oh! I may seem indelicate from your point of view, but I'm not so bad as that."

"I'm sure I never suggested such a thing," he protested, reddening.

She looked so ethereal, so pure, so exquisitely refined, as she stood there, her eyes downcast, a little flush on her face; it seemed blasphemy to associate indelicacy with her.

"And yet society would think me so!" she said scornfully—"society, which sees nothing to blush at in a risqué song, a vulgar burlesque, a prurient innuendo, a suggestive picture—society would blame a girl for talking over with the man she loves the possible consequences of their union. Oh, if you knew how hard it is for me, and yet how much

depends on it, you would help me, and not look at me like that!" she faltered.

"Dear one," cried Jack, melted utterly by these signs of emotion, "say whatever's in your mind and let us get it over. Of course I knew you wouldn't do so to anyone else. You have two questions to ask me; what are they?"

Mimi went again to her writing-table and bent her graceful head over the papers. She seemed to instinctively shrink from the task before her, and yet something forced her on.

"I want to know nothing more about you than I tell you about myself," she said, timidly handing him a roll of paper. "Will you look at this?"

Jack unfolded it.

"More documents?" he said with a quizzical air. "Why, Mimi, what on earth is it?"

It was a brief pedigree chart marked with ages, dates, and cause of death. Jack looked at it in blank amaze.

"I'm afraid it isn't a very long one," said Mimi, apologetically, "but it's all I could scrape together—only three generations, you see; I couldn't get farther back than my paternal grandfather. He was a Dutchman, and came over to 'Merica as ship's

cook, on the *Bride of Holland*, 'fore he started a store in Chicago. But that don't matter. What I want you to notice is that I come of a healthy breed, long-lived all of them except my poppa, who was killed on the elevated railway in New York City. The only dark spot is my maternal aunt, who had fits. The family surmised it was 'cause of old nurse Chloe dropping her on her head when she was in arms—but I'm not sure that it wasn't congenital," she said wistfully; "it troubles me a good deal."

Jack burst out laughing.

"So that's what you've been so busy about!" he cried. "Why, I don't even want to look at it. I marry you for yourself—only for yourself. I don't care anything about your maternal aunt—or her fits either. The idea of such a thing being an impediment between us!"

"Then it ought to be if 'twas proved," cried Mimi, flaming up, and getting fairly under weigh. "Impediment!—that's what they say in church. 'If any of you know any just cause or impediment—' but it's just a fraud. Whoever heard of anyone getting up to say, 'I forbid the banns,' because the man is a drunkard, or diseased? No. Or because there is insanity in the family? No. Or epilepsy?

No. Or any other horrid thing? No. Because a pure girl is going to be sold into the arms of a debilitated dude? No. Because the marriage is loveless? Not at all. None of these things would be just cause of impediment why the contracting parties should not come together in the eyes of the Church or of the Law. Yet they ought to be—and in my case they shall be. I am not ignorant of the cause for which matrimony was ordained. A wife, a mother, is the guardian of the health of unborn generations, and I will never betray my sacred trust."

Jack looked at her with admiration. Her eyes were lit up with enthusiasm, her bosom was heaving, her face was flushing. She waved her pretty white hands to give a point to her eloquence.

"Well, I'm with you so far as that goes," he said heartily. "But it isn't a nice thing to talk about, all the same. You need have no uneasiness on that score. I can show a clean bill of health; I come of a sturdy stock. You'd better ask my mother. She'll tell you about 'em. If that's all, let us say no more about it, and be happy. I shall understand all that is left unsaid."

“But it isn’t all,” said Mimi piteously. “We’re only half through yet.”

“Oh, Lord!” groaned Jack, “whatever’s coming next?”

There was an embarrassed pause.

Mimi sat down with her back to the light and studied the point of her dainty foot before going on. She seemed to be bracing herself up to the mark.

“It’s better that we should get these things over at once, and then never allude to them again,” she said, speaking hurriedly, the dainty colour coming and going on her cheeks. “It is because I love you so, Jack, that I’m forcing myself to speak. It isn’t pleasant, I assure you. You know my views about the equality of the sexes?”

Jack groaned again. “I know—suppose we agree to differ?”

“A man expects that a woman shall come to him, in marriage, chaste,” she went on, like one who repeats a lesson by rote. “A woman has the right to expect the same of her husband.”

“She may expect it,” said Jack with grim humour, “but whether she’ll get it—God bless my soul! that’s quite another thing.” He instinctively put himself on the defensive.

Mimi ignored the interruption and went on reciting the articles of her creed.

"I believe in an equal morality. If a girl makes a mistake she is a social outcast. A man has any amount of licence, and he's only 'a little wild.' Shame! My ideal is a man brave, strong, honest and true, a pure, stainless knight."

She paused in the contemplation of her ideal. A tender smile hovered round her mouth. Her eyes wandered dreamily through the window over the tiny river and leafy, blossomy gardens to the slopes of the hills. She was thinking of Jack all the time, though he didn't know it.

"That's all very well for the ideal," said Jack jealously. He had it in his mind that she was describing some other fellow. "But I don't see the point of it all."

His voice recalled Mimi to herself. She descended from sentiment with a rush.

"What's wrong for the woman is wrong for the man!" she said tartly; "that's the point."

"It's a point quite useless to discuss," said Jack bluntly. "Nature has settled it already. I'm not talking about the ideal, but the real. It's all rot this cant about equality."

"Are you going to defend the unequal standard?" exclaimed Mimi, flushing hotly.

"I'm defending nothing," said Jack stoutly; "I'm simply stating facts. You know all about physiology; you say then you ought to know that man is physiologically and psychologically different to woman. But, Mimi, can't we leave these unsavoury subjects alone? I don't see what it has to do with us."

"It has everything to do with us," she rejoined, a stubborn line cutting itself around the corners of her baby mouth. "A woman has a right to ask the past of the man she's going to marry."

"She's the right to ask; whether she'll get answered is another matter. The average man's past is a sort of Bluebeard's chamber—into which, if a woman be wise, she will not seek to enter. Oh! I'm speaking quite impersonally," he said, noting the blank look which swept over the girl's face. "I've always tried to keep straight—and I love you, Mimi; that'll keep me straight in the future. There's nothing like the love of a good girl to keep a man in a right path."

"Then there's no previous entanglement?" she exclaimed. But the words spoken, her lips quivered

as though they were ashamed of the words they had uttered.

“None,” said Jack, flushing indignantly. “Do you think if there was I would ask you to be my wife? My hands are free.”

“And clean?” she queried in a low voice. “As clean as you expect mine to be?”

“Well, really, Mimi,” said Jack, reddening again, “that’s wanting to know a little too much, isn’t it? I’m no worse than other young men. I’ve sown a few wild oats, I suppose. But that was before I met you.”

“Wild oats!” she echoed, recoiling from him. “Men sow them; women reap them. Am I, then, to infer—”

“I told you I was no worse than other men,” he interrupted, “nor do I suppose I am any better. You shouldn’t ask such things. I will not lie to you nor to anyone. I’m not a paragon or a galahad. Some boyish follies there may have been. They are past and gone; I’m heartily ashamed of them now.”

“Boyish follies,” she said, “of which women were the victims? I understand.”

“You understand wrong,” he said hotly. “Men have many more temptations than women. If you

will know, I had better tell you now." He paused a minute, and then went on hurriedly, in a shame-faced manner. "It was two years ago, in town—the night of the boat-race—a lot of our fellows were up for a spree . . . we had dinner at the Café Royal . . . we had been rather more than dining . . . and went on to the Alhambra . . . we had supper at the Continental . . . we rather more than supped . . ."

With a sudden gesture she sprang up, "Faugh!" she said, almost in a whisper; "the old excuse."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jack, jumping up too, "this is a little too hot. I'm off, and you won't see me again until you're in a more reasonable humour. You first ask me all sorts of questions you had better have left alone, and then you round on me because I wouldn't tell you a lie. You want too much for ordinary mortals, 'pon my soul you do; you'd better look out for your ideal man. I wish you joy of him. He'll either be a hypocrite or a liar."

He picked up his hat and strode towards the door in a huff. His hand was on the handle, when the sound of a stifled sob made him look round.

Mimi stood looking at him, the image of woe, her eyes full of tears, her bosom heaving.

“Oh, Jack, dear Jack!” she cried, running to him with outstretched arms, “don’t go away and leave me. I was jealous—really. Don’t go. I’ll never ask you any questions again—never—never! It’s all those horrid books. If you had told me—anything—anything different to what you have told me, I shouldn’t have believed you. I don’t want anyone but you—just yourself, past and all. Oh, Jack! you’ll be a real elegant husband, that you will.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ IT seems good to be home again, mother.”

Sir Kenneth Goring looked around the room with an air of content. It was a pretty old-world room, most of the furniture of the spindle-legged order, satin-wood tables, folding screens, a grand by Erard, pictures and knick-knacks scattered about—a fitting setting to the gentle old lady who was regarding her son with a quiet happiness in her eyes. For Sir Kenneth had only that day returned home, after nearly a year’s absence—a year of hard travel and harder living, of expeditions after big game in well-nigh inaccessible regions, of dare-devil adventure and hairbreadth escapes. It was over now. Gone like a tale that is told. And here he was back in England, somewhat weather-beaten, tanned from exposure to sun, wind, and rain ; but, otherwise, much the same outwardly as when we parted from him in India nigh upon two years ago.

A good deal had happened to Goring in those two years. The sudden death of his two cousins made a great change in his life. He was called Home, and had to send in his papers. He left India just before Laline's marriage took place. He found his uncle, an old feeble man, utterly broken down by the loss of his sons. Within three months of his arrival in England, Goring followed him to his grave. The young baronet soon found that Captain Goring of the 111th Regiment with next to nothing but his pay, and Sir Kenneth Goring with Burwood and a rent-roll of £7000 a year, were two very different people in the eyes of the world. But in himself he was conscious of no change. His first act was to instal his mother at Burwood. Mrs. Abington had been twice widowed. Her first husband, Goring's father, the love of her youth, died soon after the boy was born. Her second husband, Canon Abington, the partner of her middle age, had been dead ten years. All her affections were centred on her son.

It was, therefore, a blow to her when, as soon as the lawyer's business was settled, and things were put straight, Kenneth announced his intention to travel for a year. But she did not oppose him;

for the L'Estrange affair was known to her, and her mother's heart told her it was the best thing he could do. She held her peace, and made the best of it. But the county marvelled greatly.

Goring loved travel and adventure. He loved sport, not as some do for the mere brutal love of killing things, but for the excitement and danger of the chase. His travels had been for the most part in wild, unfrequented regions, and the solitude of forest and mountain had taught him something. It had done much also to heal that heart-wound which had been the origin of this prolonged travel.

He had got over it now. Perhaps, after all, the wound had never been very deep. It was a blow to his vanity rather than to his heart. He had come back to his unexpected inheritance determined to settle down, to fulfil all its duties and to enjoy all its privileges.

Mrs. Abington put her hand on her son's arm.

"It seems more like home, Kenneth, now that you have come. To tell you the truth, I have never felt quite at home in this big house. We have seen very little of one another of late years. First it was India—then this tour. And this time you have really come back for good?"

"For good and all, mother," he laughed reassuringly. "My travelling days are over. I have practically nothing left to see. I did the 'gorgeous East' long ago; and since I have come into my kingdom—you know I always said I would see the world if I got the chance—I have done North America, from Canada to 'Frisco; South America, too; the whole continent, in fact, down to Cape Horn. The world is but a little place, after all. There are some parts of Africa one might do, perhaps; but, on the whole, I think I will leave them alone. Globe-trotting is all very well, but it becomes monotonous after a time. However much one runs about, one cannot run away from oneself."

He jumped up from his chair as he spoke, and walking to the window, looked out across the garden to the park beyond. It was a sunny afternoon in late April, the grass had all the emerald freshness of spring. A few deer were browsing peacefully under the great oaks yonder, the branches of which were tipped with that warm flush which heralds the bursting of the leaf.

Mrs. Abington looked anxiously at the tall, square-shouldered figure standing at the window.

There was a ring of bitterness about his last words which she did not like.

"You are sure you have forgotten her, Kenneth?" she said timidly. "Has the wound quite healed?"

He turned round and faced her with a reassuring smile. There was a little flush on his face, barely visible beneath the tan; but his voice had a true and hearty ring about it.

"Quite healed; there isn't even a scar," he replied. "When a man has well passed thirty he is apt to look upon the loves of his youth with something of the spirit of a philosopher—at least that is how I have come to regard them—though I was rather hard hit at the time."

"Ah, Kenneth, I wish you were happily married. I shall never feel sure of your settling down until you do," said his mother wistfully.

"Married!" he echoed, laughing. "Oh, well, there is plenty of time to think about that, mother. I am not sure that I shall marry at all. Women are 'kittle cattle,' and I have singed my wings already, you know. Besides, has not someone said that 'a man married is a man marred.'"

"Do not repeat such things," said Mrs. Abington. "I am old-fashioned enough not to like them.

Marriage is too serious a thing to jest about; it is a holy estate, Kenneth, and in your position it is a necessary one."

"My position!" he repeated a little impatiently. "What has my position to do with it? A man's happiness should not be hampered by questions of position. That was what weighed with Laline L'Estrange—I should say Lady Bradford. She went to the highest bidder, and sold herself for money and a title. If she had only waited a little, she might have had both with me, and have even made a better bargain from her point of view. I am duly grateful to her now; though I didn't feel that way then. But we won't talk about it any more. You are right, as you always are. I shall doubtless come round to your way of thinking in time. Well, I'll take a stroll round and see how things are getting on, and then come back to you again."

Goring took a leisurely survey. He looked in at the stables, interviewed the gardener, visited the kennels, and sent word to his bailiff to come and see him in the morning. That being done, he strolled down to the head keeper's, and talked over with him the prospects of the shooting. He found

everything satisfactory—outwardly, at any rate. Nothing seemed to have been neglected in his absence, for his servants were old and tried. They had been with his uncle many years.

Burwood was a fine place, with a magnificently timbered park. The house was a large one, covering a lot of ground ; but hardly beautiful externally according to canons of architectural beauty. It was solidly and squarely built of stone, one of those pseudo-classical houses of the time of the Georges, which are numerous among the country houses of England. It is a style not without a certain stateliness of its own ; but it hardly harmonises with grey, northern skies. It seems to lack the colour and the gilding, the blue sky and glowing tints, the warmth and the light of the sunny south. But Burwood was a fine place for all that, with its shrubberies and terraces. Its well-kept lawns sloped down to the park, and were dotted now by flaming beds of early tulips, which flaunted their gorgeous colours in the April sun. In the elms, just shimmering with golden green, the rooks were cawing. Over all brooded the peace of a well-ordered English home.

The park was the great feature of the place. It

was extensive and undulating, richly planted and varied with delectable glades and dells, which in summer were ferny, leafy, blossoming. Through the midst the river, "with silver alders crowned," wound its way.

Goring heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he walked back across the park, and looked around with all the pride of possession.

"Yes, it is good to have a place like this," he said to himself.

His mother gave him tea in the library, a handsome room with fewer dummies and more books than the general run of country-house libraries. Whatever objection might be taken to the exterior of the house, inside it was delightful. The fittings were of other days, the fireplaces huge and massive, the tapestry rich and quaint, the hall was floored and wainscotted with oak, the staircase was of oak also. The walls were hung with pictures—here a Peter Lely, there a Kneller, though the majority of them were indifferent as works of art. They had been saved from the fire which destroyed the old house on the same site about a century before.

The fortunate owner of Burwood listened to his

mother as she told him over the teacups all the little items of news she could remember.

"And where is your companion?" asked Goring presently.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Abington, "I had quite forgotten her." A smile flashed over her face. "I have a new companion—at least, not very new now. She has been with me since last August. Don't you remember my writing, and telling you that she was coming?"

"I had forgotten," he said indifferently, "or perhaps it was in one of your letters which miscarried. I hope she is satisfactory?"

"Oh, quite," replied Mrs. Abington; "she is all that I could wish. I think myself most fortunate, and so I am sure will you, when you see her."

"And what has become of the other good lady?" he inquired, with faint interest. "I forget her name—the one who was with you when I left, you remember?"

"She left me last summer to be married; she has married very well too."

"Married, has she? Well, no woman need despair after that," said Goring, who had a dim remembrance of a remarkably plain, middle-aged spinster

of correct opinions, and correspondingly dull. "And your new companion is of the same pattern, I suppose ?" he continued.

Mrs. Abington smiled.

"Well, no, not exactly," she replied archly. "But you will be able to judge for yourself later."

"Oh, she's away, is she ?"

"She has only gone over to the rectory with a message this afternoon. She may have come back; I do not know. She knew you were coming home, and probably thought that you and I would prefer to be alone."

Then the conversation drifted off into other channels.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Two hours later the gong was sounding through the house, and Goring, ready for dinner, came out of his room and walked along the broad oaken balcony which ran around the hall. As he was about to go downstairs a door opened down the corridor, and he saw a familiar figure coming towards him. He stopped short in sheer amazement. He could hardly believe the evidence of his senses. But an instant later all doubts were dispelled, for Madeleine was speaking to him in her well-remembered voice.

“Welcome home, Sir Kenneth,” she said; “surely you have not forgotten me? Ah, but it is hardly fair to take you by surprise like this. You are astonished to see me—is it not so?”

She held out her hand to him with a nervous smile.

“I am astonished and delighted,” he said, recovering himself and shaking her warmly by the hand. “My mother did not tell me you were here.

I didn't know that you knew her—that you were in England. I am so glad to see you again. When did you come—to Burwood, I mean? To-day?"

"Nearly nine months ago last August," replied Madeleine quietly, "and I have been here ever since. I am Mrs. Abington's companion."

There was a moment's embarrassed silence. Goring was too much astonished to speak. Involuntarily his thoughts flew back to when he had seen her last—that night at Elysium. Their eyes met. He saw that she was thinking of the same thing. But he pulled himself together in a moment.

"I am very glad to hear it," he said heartily. "I had no idea that my mother was so fortunate. She should have told me." Then he stopped abruptly. The thought flashed through him that Mrs. Dampier might not wish to have the past alluded to. "Does she know?—" he began tentatively.

A faint flush swept over Madeleine's face. She broke in upon his unfinished sentence.

"She knows that we have met in India," she said, with a little gesture of her head. "I told her

when I heard that you were coming home. But she planned a little surprise for you. I—”

“It is a very pleasant surprise,” he said, with frank friendliness. He had a great desire to put her at her ease. “I can’t tell you how glad I am to see you again. How small the world is, after all. Don’t you remember in India that I used to tell you how much I should like you to know my mother? And now—”

“Here I am,” said Madeleine, laughing. Her embarrassment was disappearing before the honest gladness in his eyes. “And you are wondering how I came here? I will tell you presently—after dinner. Come, Sir Kenneth—how odd it sounds, ‘Sir Kenneth’—Mrs. Abington must be waiting, and I don’t suppose you like your soup cold.”

They went down the stairs side by side. Mrs. Abington was already in the drawing-room. She looked at her son with an amused smile.

“Ah!” she said, “I see that you have already anticipated my little surprise. Do you know, dear,” and she turned to Madeleine, “Kenneth drew a mental picture of you at tea-time—an elderly, middle-aged spinster. I watched him doing it.”

"Come, come," said Goring, laughing, "that is hardly fair. Well, I can only say that I am most agreeably disappointed. I am very glad to see Mrs. Dampier again."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Abington; "Madeleine told me that she had met you in India—at Dustypore, was it not?"

At that moment dinner was announced, and it obviated any occasion to answer the question. Madeleine said nothing more about it, and it was evident that she wished to say nothing. Goring saw from his mother's words that Mrs. Dampier had not told her any more than was necessary. He understood her reticence, and sympathised with it. Naturally she cared not to dwell upon the past; it was over and done with, and he would be the last to remind her of anything unpleasant connected with it.

It was a pleasant little dinner. Goring and his mother did most of the talking, Madeleine only throwing in a word when directly appealed to. She felt grateful to Goring that he did not appeal to her often. He rattled on about things which had happened to him on his travels, or about local matters and things which had happened during

his absence, and treated her presence there as a matter of course. He made no further allusion to India or to his surprise at meeting her.

Yet every now and then he would glance at her across the mauve and yellow tulips with which the table was decorated, and wonder how on earth she had come there. Of all strange coincidences, surely this was one of the strangest. He recalled again how he had left her that night at Elysium, white and agonised, dazed with the revelation which had burst upon her. He never saw her after that. The tale of Dampier's flight was all over Elysium next day, and his deserted wife was said to be down with brain fever. Then Lady Fitzpoodle intervened and took her away, and at the same time came his summons Home. He had heard later that Dampier was drowned near Aden, and that his widow had left India, and left no trace behind her. The confusion consequent on his uncle's death, and his subsequent travels, had prevented him from trying to find out whither she had gone.

But he had often thought of her, and wondered where she was. Now, lo ! she turned up at Burwood, and was sitting opposite him, eating her

dinner as though their meeting were the most natural thing in the world.

He stole a glance at her while his mother was telling him about the new village schools. To the casual onlooker she appeared composed enough; but as he looked more closely he noted that there was a flush on her cheek, and that her hand nervously crumbled her bread. A sense of pity swept over him. Poor little woman! She evidently felt her position—at best an invidious one—keenly. Hers had been a sad life, ill-treated, robbed of everything, left penniless to make her way in the world. Well, her lines should henceforth fall in pleasanter places if he could help it. He looked at her again, and noted the perfect contour of her cheek, the whiteness of her full, round throat, which the square-cut bodice of her simple black dinner dress revealed the wisps and tendrils of her pretty brown hair, which clung around her dainty shell-like ears. She was prettier now than in the former days in India. A sense of something more than pity stirred his pulses.

“ You are right, mother; you always are,” he said, answering at random some question which Mrs. Abington had addressed to him.

“Dear me, Kenneth!” she exclaimed, “how absent you are! I asked you if the new infant schools should be roofed with thatch or slate, and you tell me ‘I am right.’ What am I to understand by that?”

“I beg your pardon, I—”

“Was thinking of something else,” said Mrs. Abington, smiling. “Well, I forgive you. But about these schools. Mr. Jordan, the rector, thinks slate is more lasting; but I prefer thatch, it is so much more picturesque—Madeleine agrees with me.”

“Oh! let it be thatch by all means,” said Goring precipitately. “Never mind about Jordan. By the way, how is he, and his numerous family?”

“I regret to say that his family is more numerous than ever—another addition since you went away—twins.”

“What a quiverful! We shall have to rebuild the rectory as well as the infant schools, if this sort of thing goes on. How many does that make?”

“Eleven,” said Mrs. Abington tragically. “How a man is to do his duty to a large country parish

with a weakly wife and eleven children, I am at a loss to imagine."

When Goring joined the ladies in the drawing-room, after dinner, Madeleine rose to go. They would probably have much to say to one another, she thought, and she would be in the way. But he detained her.

"If I am to be the means of driving you away, Mrs. Dampier," he said laughingly, "I shall go off to the smoking-room. Mother and I have talked over all our secrets this afternoon, I assure you."

"Pray do not go, Madeleine," chimed in Mrs. Abington. "Stay and give us some music, if you are not tired. Kenneth would like to hear you sing, I am sure."

"I should like it, of all things."

"What shall I sing?" said Madeleine, without comment, moving over to the piano.

"I leave it to you; you know best," replied Mrs. Abington, composing herself to sleep, which was her way of listening.

Madeleine ran her fingers over the keys, and began with an air from some opera. Goring sat down by the piano and watched her. She sang very fairly, and without any apparent effort. She

was one of the few women who look well when they sing. When her song was ended and Mrs. Abington had drowsily told her it was "very nice," Goring held out another which he had taken from the heap of music.

"Will you sing this presently?" he said.

"I will sing it now, if you like." When she saw the title, she hesitated. "It is very sad," she said.

"It is very true."

She began without further comment.

"Alas! how easily things go wrong;
A sigh too deep, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a driving rain,
And life is never the same again.

"Alas! how seldom things go right;
'Tis hard to watch on a summer's night,
For the kiss will come, and the sigh will stay,
And a summer's night is a winter's day."

"You are right," she said, with a little sigh, when the last notes of the accompaniment had died away; "it is very true. But the more sad because it is so true."

"Yes," he answered, looking at her. Her hands were wandering idly over the keys. "It is very

true. But I think it leaves the story half-told. The winter's day does not last for ever! spring comes again, and summer too, and the flowers of love, and hope, and joy, bud and blossom again. Do you not think so?"

"With some," she said, catching his fancy—"with some it may be so—but not with all. Some the winter of adversity freezes to the heart. The flowers do not bloom again."

"It depends upon the sun they may get," he said. "If its rays be strong enough—"

"If," she broke in dreamily, "if. All the tragedy of life lies in that 'if.'" Then she said with a quick change of manner. "But don't let us moralise. At best it is a barren occupation. Talk—talk—talk is the order of the day, yet nothing is done. Every emotion is discussed, every thought dissected, every motive analysed, every faith questioned, every belief assailed, every law of God or man, or nature called into account. Nothing is sacred. Quite apart from the harm it may do, what is the good of it all?"

"Ah, I remember," he said, smiling, "you are one of those who choose the old paths, and love to walk therein."

“I do,” she said, looking straight before her, “even though the paths be thorny. At least one knows whither they lead, but these new paths, whither lead they? Into a hopeless maze, it seems to me—a chaotic confusion of right and wrong. The sign-posts which profess to point the way out of an old evil really mislead to a new lie. Half the wanderers who are groping after truth do not know the meaning of the catchwords painted thereon. But they repeat them, parrot-wise, as though they concealed profound wisdom. By-and-by they drop them, and pick up others which more exactly fit the temper of the moment. It is the old tale of always seeking some new thing—of itching ears and blind guides.”

“It may be so,” he said. “But the old paths—are they any better? Whither do they lead?”

“To the truth,” she answered. “Do you think the tried and proved experience of ages is to go for nothing?”

“By no means. But the question of all questions is, What is truth? It is no new one. Pilate asked it long ago—he had not found it.”

“No,” she answered quickly, “but the Victim of Pilate’s cowardice had. The truth is love. God is

Love. If one loves God, one will do His bidding. There is the truth which should shape our lives."

There was a brief silence. He looked at her curiously. Her hands were moving slowly over the keys, striking a soft chord here and there. He thought to himself that she had developed considerably since the Indian days. She looked, and spoke, like a different woman.

She met his eyes, and read what was passing in his mind.

"You were thinking that I have changed," she said in a low voice. "You are right, I have changed. One may change much in two years—in two hours, in two minutes even. You were thinking I am too dogmatic, too positive. I remember you used to think so; but I am different now. Yes, you were; I could hear it in your voice." She paused and then went on again. "Could you not see," she said, "I was arguing against myself? It is I who am in danger of following blind guides; of drifting like a rudderless boat out on to the dark sea of doubt. I have lost so many of my illusions; I must needs cling the more closely to the remnants of faith which are left me. You do not under-

stand me—of course not. We can never understand inconsistency in others—only in ourselves."

"I do understand you," he said eagerly, bending nearer to her, "and I sympathise with you, believe me—more than I say."

His words called a little flush to her face.

"I am grateful for your sympathy," she said, "but I doubt your understanding me. No human being ever quite understands another." She struck a chord or two on the piano thoughtfully, then she turned to him with a smile. "All this time we have been beating about the bush you have been wondering how I came here. I promised to tell you."

She told him very briefly of her meeting with Mrs. Eveline at Baden.

"I did not know Mrs. Abington was your mother," she continued. "The difference in the names misled me; nor did I know that—that Burwood was yours, until some little time after I had been here. I had not heard of your—" she was going to say "good fortune," but checked herself, and substituted—"of the change in your life before I left India. When I knew that you were Mrs. Abington's son, I told her that I had known

you in India. I did not tell her more ; not because I wished to conceal anything from her, but because —you will understand—the past is painful to me, and—and—Mrs. Abington has been so kind, so altogether delightful. I have been happy here."

She turned her head away to hide the emotion in her face. But he had caught the quiver of her lips ; he heard the sound of tears in her voice. For the second time that evening he felt his pulses thrill. It was not mere pity.

"Don't say any more about it. I understand, really understand this time," he said, his voice vibrating. "I am very glad that you like Burwood. I want to thank you for all your kindness to my mother ; she has told me about it. You have been a great comfort to her during the months that I have been away. I cannot thank you enough."

Madeleine looked at him with shining eyes.

"How good you are," she said gratefully. "You were always good to me—always a true friend. I might have known that you would have spoken like this. And yet—when I heard that you were coming home, my impulse was to go away—to avoid meeting you."

"Why on earth should you have wished to do that?" he asked, somewhat taken aback.

"I didn't wish it. But I thought it might be better. For one thing, I wanted to escape anything which would remind me of—of things I should like to forget; for another—do not be angry—I thought that you might not care to see me here. Forgive me," she said, as he made a gesture of dissent. "I did you an injustice; but people do change; circumstances change them. And then I thought—well, it does not matter what I thought, for I have not gone, you see."

"I didn't think you would have thought so badly of an old friend," he said reproachfully.

"Not of you—never of you," she said quickly; "but of the force of circumstances. Perhaps there was a little false pride in it too. One must not analyse motives too closely. Anyway, I have made my confession. I was wrong."

"And I give you absolution," he said gaily. "And now tell me, have you any news about old Indian friends? Mrs. Potter, for instance, the Fitzpoodles, and the rest."

"Very little—in fact nothing, until the last few months, since I came to England. Mrs. Potter is,

I believe, still in India, and just the same as ever. Sir Augustus and Lady Fitzpoodle have come home; they are living in Brighton. Lady Fitzpoodle leads Brighton."

"Poor Brighton!"

"You mustn't say anything against Lady Fitzpoodle," protested Madeleine. "She has her faults—who has not? But I never knew what a kind heart was hidden under her forbidding manner until—just before I left India. I can never forget her kindness. But I had lost sight of her until the last nine months. Since then I have heard from her. It was she who told me about Mrs. Potter."

Goring noticed that things with her dated from the last nine months. The rest was silence.

"And Lady Bradford?" he asked quietly. "Have you heard anything of her?" Then noticing her hesitation, "Oh, I have no soreness in that quarter now," he added, laughing.

"The Bradfords are living in town, in Eaton Square," she said, without apparently noticing his last remark. Her colour deepened. "Sir John is a confirmed invalid; he had a stroke of paralysis soon after they left India. I believe Lady Brad-

ford goes out a great deal, and is very much admired. At least so Lady Fitzpoodle told me."

There was a pause. Their thoughts flew back to the past. Goring looked at her thoughtfully for a minute.

"Do you remember when you and I—" he began.

"I remember nothing more," she said hastily. It struck her that it would be well to check the flood of this reminiscence. "At least, that is, I do not wish to remember," she corrected, in an embarrassed way. "Sir Kenneth, there is one thing I want to ask you. It is necessary that you agree to it, if I am to remain here. I want you to forget that we were friends in India."

"It is rather a hard thing to ask, isn't it?" he said ruefully. "How can I forget?"

She looked down reflectively.

"Suppose we compromise it?" she replied; "of course, one never quite forgets."

"Compromise generally means that two people agree to do a thing which suits neither. Tell me what it is you wish. You may trust me to see it carried out."

"I explained myself rather stupidly, I fear," she

said with confusion. "What I wanted to ask was this. Will you do me the kindness not to allude to—to our acquaintance in India more than you can help—for obvious reasons? I have no right to ask it, but—"

"You may trust me," he said quickly. "I am afraid I have been rather thoughtless to-night; but meeting you recalled many things. I will not offend again. But as I am to forget our old friendship, let me put in a plea that we start a new one from to-night?"

"If you wish it," she said, in a low voice. Then she added, with a shade of bitterness, "But my friendship is worth very little to anyone, least of all to you. You are rich, and therefore have many friends."

"The rich have many flatterers, but few friends," he replied, smiling; "and I am not so very rich either. In these days of landed depression and bloated Budget Bills very few of us are. You must let me be the judge of the value of your friendship. I want it. May I count on it?"

"If you wish," she said again.

"That is right," he said warmly, and held out his hand; "it is a promise, remember."

Her hand rested for one second in his. Then she turned away, the colour creeping over her face. She shut down the piano.

“The clock has chimed eleven, Sir Kenneth,” she said demurely, “and Mrs. Abington has been dozing peacefully for the last hour, two things which remind me that it is time that we should say good-night.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE days which followed passed quickly. The excitement created by Sir Kenneth's return to a certain extent subsided, and the place began to settle down to its usual orderly routine. But things were hardly as they were before. The presence of the master sent a quickened impetus throughout the household.

Goring could not escape from his responsibilities even if he had wished to do so. There were farms to be visited, agents and business men to be interviewed, calls to be made, and dinners to be given and to be returned. All the solemn, slow-going machinery of English country-house life was set in motion.

Through all this, Madeleine pursued the even tenor of her way. Her days were spent with Mrs. Abington as before, and she rendered her all those numerous little attentions which only a service born of love can give. For this gentle old woman

had wound herself closely around Madeleine's heart. Human nature must have something to love. If it has not, it becomes starved, unhappy, warped, thrown back upon itself. Madeleine's nature had been in danger of becoming cramped; but now, with the new interests which entered into her life, it expanded again. Under the spell of the influences around her, she almost forgot her past troubles in her present happiness.

Of Goring, after the first evening, she did not see over-much. The first weeks of his return were necessarily busy ones. He was occupied most of the day; he dined out a great deal, or there were dinner-parties at home. But the understanding between them held good. He did not again allude to the past; he scarcely ever mentioned India; but he never met her without a smile or some friendly words. And there were evenings now and again —quiet home evenings like that first one—when she would play to him in the soft May twilight, or later, when the lights came in, they would talk together, while Mrs. Abington, all oblivious, dozed in her chair. It is this faint dawn of conscious affinity which is so sweet in the intercourse between man and woman. It is a time of delicate half-confidences

of unuttered thoughts—thoughts perhaps hardly admitted even to themselves ; it is the budding of love's flower.

She did not know—how could she ?—that these evenings lingered in his memory, that as he went off to the smoking-room, he would carry away with him a mental picture of a good and gracious woman—a woman who was in all things womanly. He loved to think of her so, and the low tones of her voice would linger in his ears as he sat alone—thinking—thinking—thinking far into the night.

He did not know—how could he ?—that she would catch herself dwelling on some chance smile, on a voice which now and then took a deeper meaning, on little sentences, little gestures that would come back to her ever and anon, bringing with them a strange, sweet joy. One night especially she remembered. She caught his eyes resting on her with a look she had not seen in them before. The blood flushed to her face ; there was a moment's embarrassment.

In the solitude of her room that night she scolded her truant fancy, and strove to banish the memory from her thoughts.

“ Am I a silly girl,” she asked herself scornfully

"that my heart should beat the faster because of a look in a man's eyes? Have I not done with such things? And yet—but a truce to such folly."

The weeks sped by. Uncertain May's alternate sunshine and rain, cold and heat, was followed by leafy June, with its prodigal foliage and fragrant yield of flowers. The gardens and shrubberies around Burwood were full of colour and bloom—the laburnums swung their golden chains to and fro in the summer breeze, the guelder-roses shed their snowy balls, the brief, exquisite season of the lilac faded and died.

A year had passed since Mrs. Eveline had met Madeleine at Baden.

One morning towards the end of June Mrs. Abing-ton told Madeleine that the Evelines were coming.

"I am so glad they can come," she said, handing her the letter with an air of satisfaction. "You will be glad too, will you not? It is a long time since Anna Eveline paid me a visit. Five or six years ago, I think, when Jack was a boy at Harrow. And now he is bringing his bride. Dear me! he's very young to be married, and so is she too—a mere girl—but then she is an American, and they have a different way of looking at these things, I suppose.

Anna seems to be pleased with her—which is saying a great deal—for she idolises her son. Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes, she was at Baden last summer; it was there they became engaged, after that accident at the castle; I told you about it. I like her. She is a bright, high-spirited girl—a little unconventional, perhaps—in some ways very much so, for she has a hobby, and rides it hard. Her ideas are somewhat—well—advanced. But she is thoroughly good at bottom, and most kind-hearted."

"She is wealthy, Anna tells me," went on Mrs. Abington. "All Americans are wealthy, it seems to me. Well, I am glad, for the Evelines are not overburdened with riches. Jack will be able to indulge his tastes, which are not inexpensive ones. I am glad she is a good girl too, for riches do not always mean happiness."

"I think it is the fault of the people who possess them, when they do not," said Madeleine quietly.

Mrs. Abington did not hear the remark.

"I shall be glad to see her," she said presently. "A young American bride—high-spirited—with unconventional, advanced views. What are they, I

wonder? I am so very conservative myself. Dear me, I am afraid she will find our quiet hum-drum life very dull. We must try to get up something in her honour, a dance or something. We have done nothing for Kenneth's home-coming except a few duty dinners. We might celebrate the two events together. Yes, we will have a dance and a garden-party as well. I shall have to bring out my diamonds again. You have never seen them, have you, Madeleine—the Goring diamonds—they are heir-looms, and supposed to be the finest in the county? I am afraid, though, the county has had few opportunities of seeing them of late years. I must talk it all over with Kenneth this evening. Julie!"

"Madame!" replied the French maid with suspicious alacrity, coming through the half-open door of the adjoining room.

She was a tall, black-browed, tight-waisted Frenchwoman, with a certain air about her which suggested rather the *demi-mondaine* than the lady's-maid. But Mrs. Abington had no experience of the former species, and she saw little amiss.

"Ah, Julie," she said, "I thought I heard you there; what were you doing?"

"I was looking through the laces of madame," replied the maid dutifully, but there was a certain glitter in her eyes which hardly accorded with her submissive demeanour. "Does madame want me?"

"Yes; will you go to Mrs. Moffatt"—Mrs. Moffatt was the housekeeper—"and ask her to come and see me? And, Julie, you may leave the laces alone for the present."

"What an unpleasant manner that woman has," said Madeleine when the maid had left the room.

"She is not all one could wish, but she is a deft maid, and knows her work thoroughly. I do not like to get rid of her without a sufficient reason. You see she has not been with me a month yet, hardly time for her to adapt herself to one's wishes in all things, and then she is a Frenchwoman, which makes a difference, I suppose—one cannot have everything."

"Oh, no, of course not," said Madeleine. "It is only her manner which strikes me as being odd. It reminds me of something—I hardly know what."

But she knew what it was that repelled her.

She had seen something very like it in India years ago, and at Baden.

The Evelines arrived in due course. Mrs. Eveline, brisk, alert and cheery as ever, was delighted to greet Mrs. Abington and Goring, and rejoiced to see Madeleine once more. The professor was obedient as ever to his wife's behests, and full of indignation just now at an attack which had been made by an anonymous correspondent in the *Times* upon the election of Fellows of the Royal Society. Jack was in the seventh heaven, as befitted a husband of three months' standing. The bride brought with her a multitude of Paris-made gowns—marvellous creations of Worth. She was brilliant, independent, unconventional as ever.

"And you like Paris, dear?" Mrs. Abington asked her that evening at dinner.

Mrs. Jack (warned by her husband to keep off forbidden topics) had relieved herself by rattling on about the divine Sara, Réjane, the Salons, and Worth's new confections, in a way that fairly took her hostess' breath away.

"I adore it!" exclaimed Mimi; "it's just too lovely. If I had my way I'd live there always,

but I haven't now, and so I follow Jack," with a roguish smile across the table. "All Americans are nuts on Paris. It's just heaven."

Mrs. Abington looked a little startled. This product of a nation young and full-blooded, with her open disregard for conventional forms of speech, was new to her.

"We are going across the Pond in August to have a look round," she went on. "Jack's going to show off his points, aren't you, Jack? When that's over we are coming to settle down in England. Jack's going to buy a place somewhere. Do you know," looking around her, "I should like to settle down in just such a place as this."

Goring laughed.

"There are plenty of them in the market now," he said, "especially if you don't mind being a little far from London. You've only to give Mr. Lumpkin a call. He'll find you a dozen such tomorrow."

"Ah!" cried Mimi, clapping her hands, "is it as easy as that? We'll go and give him a look up when we are next in town anyway. Say, Jack, shall we? But it wouldn't be the same thing.

We might buy a place, but we couldn't buy the associations along with it. They wouldn't be our associations. I should feel like a jay strutting in peacock's plumes—some. There is a cut about your old British landed gentry—I don't mean the new bunkum, but the real article—which we don't raise our side of the pond, except down south, where the pedigrees go back—for ever and ever—regular F. F. V.'s. That sort of thing only comes after a family has lived in a place many generations—ancestors and all that. Now I haven't got any ancestors. I was raised in Chicago, you know."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Abington vaguely, feeling she must say something. These confidences before the servants were a little embarrassing, and Mrs. Eveline was getting quite red. The professor was oblivious ; he was expatiating on beetles to Madeleine. "A very fine city I believe Chicago is. What is it noted for ? Do you remember, Madeleine, what it was we were reading about Chicago the other day ?"

"Pigs, most probably," said Mimi brusquely. "They call it Porkopolis, you know. Nearly everyone used to be in the pork line there at one time—my poppa among them. That's how he

made his pile—he dabbled in other things as well—but it was mostly pork that did it."

"Pork!" said Mrs. Abington, with a little gasp. She thought of that terrible *vehm-gericht* in the servants' hall.

But the butler's face behind Sir Kenneth's chair was as impassive as a Sphinx.

"Yes, pork," repeated Mrs. Jack doughtily. "Don't blush, Jack; there's nothing vulgar in having made one's money in pork; the vulgarity lies in being ashamed of it. Why, half your new British peers are brewers, or contractors, or tradesmen of one kind or another, aren't they?"

"A fair retort," said Goring, laughing. "But generally they Burke the beer-barrel, blazon a gorgeous coat of arms from the Herald's Office, and brazen it out that their ancestors came over with the Conqueror."

"Well, I'm not going to sail under false colours anyway," rejoined the out-spoken young woman. "I guess it is better to climb up the ladder than to slither down; and you shouldn't be ashamed of the ladder by which you climbed."

"Bravo! Scored two for the stars and stripes," laughed Goring.

"You see, they are very democratic in America," Mrs. Eveline explained apologetically to her hostess. "Mimi doesn't believe in an aristocracy or anything of that kind."

"You're wrong there, momma," corrected her daughter-in-law. "That's just what I do believe in, only it must be an aristocracy of blood and breed—nature's aristocracy—and not the outcome of diseased conditions. I'm a bit of a democrat, I own, but I don't believe in the majority vote, so long as the unfit are in the majority."

"I agree with you," said Mrs. Abington, feeling on safe ground again; "it is a fatal mistake to place political power in the hands of the uneducated classes."

"We must raise the standard of breeding and environment all round," said Mimi dogmatically.

"Ah! yes," said Mrs. Abington, "I'm afraid it is easier said than done."

"There's only one way," said Mimi with charming cock-sureness. "We must first eliminate the unfit, and then proceed on the principles of scientific selection."

"Yes; but who are the unfit?" laughed Goring, "or, rather, who are they not?"

“ All those who are unsound in mind or body are the unfit,” replied Mimi with parrot-like promptness.

“ By Jove ! you’ll have to be careful or you’ll eliminate the lot of us. How are you going to set about it ? ”

“ I mean the radically unsound,” corrected Mimi. “ Oh, I should make a clean sweep of ‘em—no pop-gun measures for me—put them into a lethal chamber and kill ‘em off kindly for the benefit of the race. That’s the only way.”

“ Good Heavens ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Abington, aghast, “ what a pagan idea ! ”

“ She’s only joking,” said Jack ; “ she wouldn’t kill a mouse, really.”

“ Indeed but I’m not joking,” declared Mimi indignantly ; “ I’m serious.”

“ Well, never mind,” said Goring, interposing. “ We’ll suppose the unfit polished off. What of the survivors, Mrs. Jack ? ”

“ I should sort them on the best principles of scientific selection—no mixing the species, except without careful consideration.”

“ Yes, great care should be exercised in keeping the species distinct,” said the professor. He had

only caught the last words, and thought that they referred to beetles.

"That's so, poppa," said Mimi, hailing her new ally. "The greatest care, that's what I say. If people would only take the same thought about the pedigrees of their children as they do about racehorses and prize animals, how much better it would be for the human race."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Abington, looking extremely uncomfortable, and thinking how fortunate it was that the servants had left the room. "These are new ideas indeed."

"Not at all," said Goring, laughing; "they are as old as the days of Plato. You've read the *Republic*, I see, Mrs. Jack."

"I surmise I'd better say no more on that count," said Mimi. "There's Jack signalling to me. I thought 'twas only the marriage question which was tabooed. I'm sorry. Besides, in any plan for the improvement of the race, it's not merely heredity that has to be considered, but also environment. And the first step in that direction will have to be the redistribution of wealth."

"Well, you might begin by redistributing your own. There's nothing like the force of example, you know."

“ Oh ! ” said Mimi airily, “ our pile would be just a drop in the ocean, unless everybody else did the same. Money runs to corners, terribly, especially in New York City. Now, I remember, way down Wall Street—”

Here Mrs. Abington gave the signal to withdraw. She had had quite enough of Mrs. Jack’s reminiscences for one evening.

Later the same evening, when the men had gone off to smoke and the women to their rooms, Mrs. Eveline tapped at Madeleine’s door. It was the time of hair-brushing and confidences. Mrs. Eveline settled herself down in her chair for a chat.

“ Dear,” she said, looking approvingly round the room, “ you look ten years younger than you did at Baden last summer. How happily everything has turned out. For you are happy, aren’t you ? ”

“ More happy than I ever thought to be again,” replied Madeleine, “ and all thanks to you.”

“ No thanks to me,” said Mrs. Eveline, with a gesture of disclaimer; “ thanks to your own sweet self, which endears you to everybody with whom you come into contact. Mrs. Abington tells me you are like a daughter to her. Oh, Madeleine, I wish you were her daughter in reality.”

“What do you mean?” asked Madeleine with confusion.

“You know perfectly well,” said Mrs. Eveline composedly, “or you wouldn’t blush like that. I mean, what an excellent thing it would be if you and Kenneth were to make a match of it. It is high time he was married, and you would be just the wife for him. I believe he thinks so too, for his eyes seem to follow you everywhere—even Mimi noticed it. I shall sound Mrs. Abington about it when I get her alone.”

“Pray, do nothing of the kind,” exclaimed Madeleine, startled by these match-making propensities. “How you jump at conclusions, Anna; Sir Kenneth is nothing to me, and I am nothing to him—except his mother’s companion,” she added a little bitterly.

“Well, I hope you may be his companion too. He couldn’t have a better,” said Mrs. Eveline shortly.

She took up her candle, and went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ONE morning, a few days after the arrival of the Evelines, Goring proposed an excursion to Merle Court, an Elizabethan manor-house, some five or six miles distant.

“As you are interested in old places,” he said to Mrs. Jack, “you will be delighted with this one. It takes one back two or three centuries ago. Arabella Fermor lived there, the Belinda of Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*, and many of the poet’s letters are dated from there, in which he gives us quaint glimpses of English country-house life as it was in his day. It is quite one of the places to see about here, and the drive to it is very pretty.”

“Oh, let us go by all means,” cried Mimi, jumping at the idea. “I wouldn’t miss seeing it for a long chalk. Who lives there now?”

“No one—at least, it is abandoned to a caretaker; and the wings are broken up into small tenements, and let off to cottagers—but I can take you all over

it. The point to be considered is, shall we make a day of it, and have luncheon in the woods—or would you rather drive over in the afternoon?"

"I'm for making a day of it," said Jack, and the others agreed.

They started—all except Mrs. Abington—soon after noon, and after an hour's drive, reached the woods. About half a mile through thick fir trees, and ferny, heathery dells, and they arrived at the spot where it was arranged that the servants should meet them with luncheon.

It was a charming nook in the centre of the wood, reached only by a moss-grown path. A great oval-shaped pond, fringed around on two sides with alder and mountain ash, lay shimmering in the sunshine, calm, still, and peaceful as the Enchanted Lake. Luncheon was spread on a grassy knoll beneath some fir trees by the water side.

They were a merry party, and did justice to the meal. When it was over, Goring proposed that they should walk through the woods to Merle Court.

"It is only a mile from here, and shady the whole way," he said. "We will drive home from there."

They strolled leisurely through the wood. It was not a day to hurry; everything was somnolent. The bees were humming drowsily in the bracken, the warm air was full of the fragrance of the firs, everything was asleep. Presently they came out of the wood, and walked down a narrow, high-banked lane, then they crossed a meadow. The old house stood revealed to view, with its quaint frontage, clustering chimneys, red-tiled roof, and background of oaks and firs, much as it must have stood in the days of the great Tudor Queen.

They explored everything. The so-called ball-room, a long room at the top of the house, with deep recessed windows looking out on to the front; the haunted staircase, the secret hiding-place where guns were stowed away during the Great Rebellion; the painted oratory, where the letters M. R. were blazoned in scarlet and tarnished gold; and the dismantled chapel, now a bare, whitewashed room.

“See,” said Goring, opening a small door at the side of the fireplace, “this leads to the secret stairway by which the priest used to descend to celebrate mass, in the days when the harbouring of priests was a penal offence. The family to whom

the old manor-house belonged for generations, clung fast to the ancient faith."

"It seems a very obvious hiding-place," said Madeleine, peering into the darkness; "but perhaps in those days it was more carefully concealed than it is now. Let us hope so, for the priest's sake."

"He couldn't have been very corpulent, I surmise, or he would have got wedged in half-way," chimed in Mimi. "But let us go downstairs; we haven't half done the show yet."

They went down the broad, shallow oak stairs, black with age, to a large hall, with a massive stone fireplace, an elaborately-wrought ceiling, and marble pavement. The ceiling was sadly out of repair, the marble slabs were cracked and broken, and the great fireplace was scratched and damaged by the cottagers, who did their cooking here.

"To whom does this place belong?" asked Mimi, with a disparaging sniff. "It's a regular old rat's hole. Perhaps the owner is one of those poor landlords you were telling me about, Sir Kenneth?"

"On the contrary, the owner is a rich man; but I don't think he is much of an archaeologist."

"He must be real mean," cried Mimi, with Trans-

atlantic bluntness. "I'd give him a bad quarter of an hour if I saw him. Come, Jack, let's get a whiff of air outside. There's a regular frowst on in here."

There was a raised terrace at the back of the house. It overlooked a high-walled garden, which was planned out just as it had been in the days when one of Queen Anne's maids of honour was wont to come down here from Hampton Court, and take "counsel and tea" with the poet, who afterwards immortalised her as Belinda. The hand of the Goth was not so visible here; most of the flowers had given place to potatoes and cabbages, it is true, but those which remained were old-fashioned ones. Great, limp trails of love-lies-bleeding sprawled over the box-bordered paths, and monstrous sunflowers flaunted their faces upwards to the sun.

Madeleine and Goring found themselves presently apart from the others, at one end of the terrace. They leant against the lichened wall and looked down at the chain of fish-ponds, which were covered with creamy duckweed of vivid green.

"It is a perfect place," she said softly, looking towards the sun-bathed house. "Every part of it

teems with memories of the past; there is an old-world glamour over all. Can you not imagine Belinda walking along those pleached alleys, gathering rose leaves for her pot-pourri (I don't think they called it that in those days) and sprigs of lavender for her linen chests, or perchance listening to Pope's lively sallies?"

"Yes," he answered, catching her humour, "one almost expects to see a fair Amoret in farthingale flit across the terrace, or a cavalier come out from yonder wood. Pope, Sterne, Gay, Swift—all the wits of a witty age, here is the fitting setting for them all. Or perchance some coy maid would steal out to meet her lover by the quaint clipped yew. I can picture it so."

"We are romancing," she said, with a little laugh. "You have surfeited yourself with local lore. But see, the picture has filled in—yonder are the central figures."

At that moment Jack Eveline and his wife walked slowly along the garden path.

"There are your lovers."

"Wedded lovers," Goring rejoined, "but lovers still."

"Yes, love at its freshest and its best, pure and unsullied. It only comes once in a lifetime."

She was hardly thinking what she said ; she was only conscious of a dull pain which the memory of her own wasted youth had called back.

She put her hand on the wall.

He covered it with his own ; his voice was lowered.

“ Do you not think there may be an aftermath,” he said, “ a second love, not less sweet than the first, though it may be of a different nature, and all the more enduring because it is not born of the moment, and all the more purified because it has known what suffering is ? Do you not think so ? ”

The blood surged over her face. She was conscious of a frightened joy.

“ I—I—do not know,” she faltered.

But she did not take away her hand.

He moved nearer, and bowed his head down to hers ; his breath was on her cheek, when—

“ Mrs. Dampier!—Sir Kenneth!” cried a raucous voice just behind them, “ can you tell me where my wife is ? I have been looking for her everywhere. I have caught a magnificent specimen of the *Libellula*, and don’t know where to put it. She has my little tin box in her pocket.”

At the sound of the professor’s voice, Madeleine

started and pulled away her hand. Goring tried to appear unembarrassed, but only succeeded in looking savage :

Neither spoke.

The professor looked from one to the other, and short-sighted though he was, even he could not fail to see that there was something wrong.

“ Oh ! I beg your pardon,” he said, floundering about for an excuse, and thereby making matters worse. “ I am sorry—I—er—interrupted you—I was—er—looking for my wife. Ah ! here you are, Anna,” he exclaimed, in a relieved tone, as that lady appeared round the corner.

“ Yes, here I am,” said Mrs. Eveline with unusual acidity in her voice. “ What is it you want, James ? There—come away, do,” she added in an undertone of intense exasperation, taking him by the arm. “ Can’t you see that you are not wanted here ? ”

“ It is beginning to be apparent to me,” replied the professor, as he suffered himself to be led away. “ I am sorry I spoke—I had not the slightest intention of interrupting them, I am sure ; but it was —er—a somewhat public place. If you will give

me that tin box in your pocket, Anna, we will put in the specimen at once."

"Oh, do be quiet," said his wife, "or I'll throw the box into the fishpond. You have spoiled everything. Isn't that enough for one day without worrying me about specimens. In another minute he would have proposed to her. Oh, why—why did I go and marry a man who has no eyes for anything except beetles and flies?"

The spell was broken. Madeleine avoided Goring for the rest of the afternoon, and she effectually outwitted Mrs. Eveline's manœuvres for them to drive home together.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ HAVE a drink, Jack ?” asked Goring.

The two were sitting together in the smoking-room the evening of the same day.

“ Thanks.” He helped himself to a whisky-and-soda, and threw himself into one of the easiest of the easy-chairs. “ No,” rejecting a proffered box of cigars, “ I think I’ll keep to my pipe. A cigarette after dinner, a cigar at odd times, but for all round smoking give me a pipe.”

Goring made no reply to this profound remark. He selected a weed himself, lit it, and sat down ; and apparently lost himself in thought.

The ladies had retired—presumably to bed. The professor had retired also, and the two were alone. It was a comfortable room—this snuggery which Goring had consecrated to the goddess Nicotine.

A low bookcase ran along one side of the room, filled chiefly with yellow-backs, sporting novels, books of travel and adventure, the Badminton

series, and so forth ; the top of it was covered with photographs and curios innumerable. Along another side was a sort of Turkish divan heaped up with cushions. Comfortable easy-chairs were scattered about, and little tables littered with newspapers and magazines. There were some quaint old prints on the walls, some of them a trifle indecent, a Mahomedan prayer - carpet and a Koran on its wooden stand. There was a fine head of a wapiti over the fireplace, with magnificent antlers like the branches of a tree ; it was flanked on either side by heads of ibex, elk, and bison. Further testimony to the prowess of Goring's gun was evidenced by a table covered with a 'possum skin, and by the skin of a splendid tiger thrown on the Smyrna carpet.

For some minutes they smoked in silence, Jack skimming the pages of the *Field*. Every now and then he glanced at his host over the top of the paper.

Presently he cleared his throat and said tentatively :

"Aren't you going it a bit strong with Mrs. Dampier, old chap ?"

Goring sprang up from the chair and stood with

his back to the fireplace looking down on his inquisitor, half in anger, half in astonishment. Something like a flush burnt itself on his face.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said at last. "What infernal cheek!"

"Oh, I beg pardon," apologised Jack, rather lamely; "no offence, I am sure, only—" inconsequently, "she's a stunner."

Goring did not seem altogether to relish this definition.

"Which being translated?" he asked drily.

"Means that she is a charmin' woman and as good as she's beautiful," responded Jack, rather uncomfortably.

Goring thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his smoking-coat.

"I quite agree with you," he said. "But I don't know why you should choose this particular time for chanting Mrs. Dampier's praises. Well?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jack, wishing that he had held his tongue. "No particular reason at all, only this afternoon we saw you together on the terrace. We couldn't help seeing you, in point of fact, and we thought—that is, Eva thought—that is, I thought—"

“That I was going to ask her to be my wife?” said Goring quietly. “You were quite right. I should have done so if your old fool of a father hadn’t come blundering round the corner just when he did.”

“Great Scot! how you must have cursed him,” exclaimed Jack, with a grin.

“And I have every intention of asking her,” continued Goring, ignoring the interruption, “on the first opportunity which presents itself. I only hope she will have me.”

“She will be a fool if she doesn’t,” quoth Jack bluntly. Then noticing the cloud on the other’s face: “Oh, again, no offence, old fellow. What I mean is, of course, she is not very well off, poor thing; and you—er—” He suddenly remembered that any allusions of this kind would not be in good taste. “You are a deuced good sort of a chap, you know,” he tailed off vaguely, and gulped down the rest of his whisky-and-soda.

“I shall think myself a very lucky one if she accepts me.”

“And so you will be, so you will,” cried Jack heartily, feeling himself on safe ground at last. “And so will she be very fortunate too. You are

both so well suited to one another, don't you know. A man is never so fortunate as when he is married to a woman who suits him, when they've got the same tastes and that sort of thing. I speak with experience," continued this three-months-old husband. "Look at Mimi and me, we suit one another down to the ground. Not but what she's a hundred times too good for me, of course. Why, she's—"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," broke in Goring, unkindly cutting short this flood of uxorious rapture. "Your wife is everything that is delightful, that goes without saying. But, in the case of Mrs. Dampier and myself, it is—well, not quite the same thing—we are older for one thing, and then we have had more experience, you see."

"I should think she would be rather glad to forget her experience," thought Jack to himself.

Aloud he said, jumping up and holding out his hand :

"Well, I wish you joy with all my heart, old fellow. How pleased the mater will be! Go in and win, that's what I say."

"Thank you," said Goring cordially. "But not a word of this to anyone else, mind. What I have

told you has been in confidence. You see, I don't even know yet what Madeleine—Mrs. Dampier—will have to say in the matter."

"Of course you may trust me. I'll be as silent as the grave."

Yet such is the weakness of man, that before he was allowed to sleep that night, he had confided the whole conversation, under a vow of the most solemn secrecy, of course, to the wife of his bosom.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GORING found it, in the days which followed, difficult to get an opportunity of speaking the words which were on his lips. Madeleine seemed to avoid him, and she certainly avoided being alone with him. It was not coyness which made her do this, but the struggle which was going on within herself, between her love and what she conceived to be her duty. Ever since Goring had so nearly surprised her into a confession of love on the terrace of Merle Court she had been striving to think out the right course. That he loved her was plain. That she loved him her heart told her when she strove to argue down the joy which would spring up in her breast, giving her a glimpse of happiness greater than she had dreamed of. She loved him not with the timid love of a maiden, but with the deep, enduring love of a woman who had passed her youth's first bloom and who knew what love was, and what suffering was.

It was because she loved him that her hesitation arose. Was she a fit wife for him ? She who had been the wife of Wortley Dampier, the memory of whose misdeeds, even though he was dead, still clung around her ? She could not let the dead past bury its dead ; with her, it was hardly dead yet. It was not her fault, it was her misfortune, but the world is not too charitably given to distinguish between the two, and her over-sensitive mind was prone to magnify the drawback. She did not realise that if the world remembers, it also forgets. And there was another consideration too. Would it not be best that he should wed some young girl into whose life suffering had not entered, and raise up heirs to his name ? Worldly consideration whispered to her that it would, and she almost argued herself into believing it. Then a great flood of love and longing would arise in her heart, and sweep all barriers down. Why should she always crucify her affections ? It was a hard struggle, a struggle which it is only given to certain natures to know.

Meanwhile, visitors were coming and going at Burwood. Every day there was something going on ; the house wore an unwonted air of bustle

and festivity. As Mrs. Abington said, "It hardly knew itself." There had been a dinner-party and garden-party, and several festivities in the neighbourhood, chiefly, it must be admitted, of the garden-party order—melancholy entertainments, at which, in nine cases out of ten, if it does not rain it looks as if it were going to do so, and people—women and parsons for the most part—sit or stand about, shivering, on the damp grass, looking at indifferent tennis, or listening to a still more indifferent band, and trying to solace themselves at intervals with insipid strawberries and lukewarm tea.

The dance at Burwood was the culminating point of these festivities. Everything was well done. The fine rooms, which opened into one another, were admirably adapted for this sort of thing, and a tent, with a floor laid down on springs, had been built, rigged up outside the windows of the great drawing-room to provide extra accommodation for the dancers. The rooms were freely decorated with flowers, and lighted in the old-fashioned way with wax candles in sconces around the walls. Huge blocks of ice, fringed round with ferns and plants, gave forth a refreshing coolness.

The guests came from far and near. All the people in the neighbourhood brought house-parties. Burwood had been shut up for so long that everyone was keen on seeing it under its altered conditions.

Mrs. Abington had donned the usual black velvet and point lace, and her unusual diamonds—the matchless Goring diamonds—blazed in her hair and on her bodice and around her neck.

Goring, as host, in duty bound, walked through a set of Lancers with the wife of the High Sheriff, and did several other duty dances. Then he claimed one from Madeleine.

“ Dear me ! ” exclaimed Lady Scrawley (the wife of a neighbouring baronet) from the raised seat upon which the chaperons were elevated round the room, looking like so many gorgeously feathered birds, “ who is that very distinguished-looking woman dancing with Sir Kenneth ? ”

“ That ? ” said Mrs. Jordan, the rector’s wife, who was sitting next to her in her best black silk. “ Oh, that is a Mrs. Dampier—surely you have heard of Mrs. Dampier, Lady Scrawley ? —Mrs. Abington’s companion, and they *do* say ”—here she

lowered her voice and said a few words in an undertone.

“Really, you don’t say so?” ejaculated Lady Scrawley, “and only a companion too! Well I should never have guessed it from the way she goes on—but no doubt she feels she will soon be something else. Poor dear Mrs. Abington, how very unwise of her to have such a woman in the house—and a widow too, they are always so designing. And they knew one another in India, you say—in her first husband’s time? Dear me! Poor Mrs. Abington! Why, her son will get caught under her very nose.”

“He might do worse,” broke in Mrs. Eveline, who was standing by, taking up the cudgels stoutly. “Mrs. Dampier is my very dear friend.”

“Really!” drawled Lady Scrawley again, turning on her assailant. “How very interesting. What is the name, do you say? Dampier? Ah, one of the Blankshire Dampiers, I suppose?”

Lady Scrawley herself hailed from a well-known firm of coachbuilders in Long Acre.

“I do not know,” said Mrs. Eveline. She had some experience of women’s tongues, and she disliked this Lady Scrawley. “I know nothing about

her husband's family or about him, beyond that he was an officer in the army. But I have known Mrs. Dampier all my life. Her father was the rector of the adjoining parish to us in Cornwall."

"Really," said Lady Scrawley for the third time. "A clergyman's daughter was she? Very nice, of course—but hardly a suitable alliance for one of our old county families."

"Our county families sometimes ally themselves much lower than that," indignantly retorted Mrs. Eveline with meaning.

But Lady Scrawley, who possessed the skin of a rhinoceros, complacently settled her bracelets on her skinny arms and took no notice. Besides, just then her attention was diverted.

"Ah! how do you do, Captain Davenport?" she cried, grabbing at that unfortunate youth, who happened to be standing near for a moment. He was Home from India now, and had run down to Burwood to see his old comrade. "You are not dancing this? Let me introduce you to my youngest daughter, Sophia," a red-haired, raw-boned damsel who was sitting partnerless, disconsolate as Ariadne, against the wall.

Meanwhile, Goring and Madeleine had gone out into the summer's night.

The garden was not illuminated with twinkling lights after the manner of Rosherville and the Earl's Court exhibitions. The stars and the moon gave light enough.

There were a good many couples pacing up and down the terrace. But these two tacitly avoided them, and walked almost in silence along the gravel path which led away from the terrace. Presently they came to a place where the paths converged. In the centre was a fountain with a quaint Triton, who tossed up a jet of water in the moonlight. The water splashed in a myriad of tiny dimples into the stone basin below. There was no one here; the lighted windows of the house seemed far away.

Goring pulled forward a garden seat, and they sat down.

Madeleine knew what was coming; and even now, at the eleventh hour, she knew not what answer to give. She turned her head and looked at the flat leaves and bronze buds of the close-shut lilies which floated on the surface of the water.

Presently he asked, breaking a rather lengthy pause:

“Why have you avoided me the last few days?”

“I—I—am sorry,” she said confusedly. “I did not mean—it was not intentional—”

The words of excuse faltered as she met his eyes. She lowered her gaze to the lilies again.

“I am afraid it was intentional,” he said quietly. “Ever since that day at Merle Court I have hardly been given a chance of getting a word with you—never a chance of seeing you alone. And I wanted to see you alone; you must have known that.”

She shivered a little as if with cold, and drew her wrap closer around her shoulders. It was the only sign she gave of the tumult which was going on in her heart.

“I am sorry—” she began again.

At that moment the sound of music floated to them through the lighted windows. She hailed it as deliverance.

“Hark!” she said, half-rising, “there is the next dance. Had we not better be going back?”

He laid a detaining hand on her arm.

“Not yet—not yet,” he said imploringly. “I

have something to say to you, something I must say."

"Do not say it," she cried, shrinking back. "I—I—do not know what it is, at least I think not; but, believe me, it is better left unsaid."

"It is a request," he continued; "I want you to grant it to me. Surely you will hear what it is?"

"No, no!" she cried; "not now—any time but now. I cannot grant anything. I have nothing to grant. Do let us go back to the house."

"Not until I have your answer," he said, with gentle insistence. "Madeleine, I want you to be my wife."

"Your wife!" she echoed. A flood of crimson rushed over her face, and then ebbed, leaving her white.

"Yes," he said simply; "my wife. I love you, Madeleine."

The light of his love shone in his face.

"Oh, hush, hush!" she said, shrinking back from him. "Such love is not for me. You forget—you have not thought—who, and what I am—no fit wife for you. What would the world say?"

"That I am a most fortunate man," he answered lightly. "What else should it say? What does it

matter what it says ? What is the world to us if we love one another ? What possible difference can your being poor make to me ? It is yourself I want—and only yourself."

" It is not only that I am poor," she said, her lips quivering ; " if it were merely my poverty that would be a small matter. But there is something else. On me there rests the shadow of disgrace. You know what manner of man my husband was—and I—I bear his name."

" He was a scoundrel !" he said. " He is dead. *De mortuis— Let that pass.*"

" He is dead, yes," she said sadly ; " but his ill deeds live after him. And I—I was his wife. You have surely forgotten it—the wife of a man whose name in India was a by-word, whose death alone saved him from public exposure and disgrace. In your generosity you would forget that, and wed me in spite of all. But would the world forget, think you ? No sooner were it known that I was to be your wife than every discreditable incident would be raked up again to furnish a means of throwing mud—not on me only, that would matter little, but through me—at an honoured name. No, it must not be."

“ Madeleine,” he said, ignoring her words, and his voice took a deeper tone, “ tell me—one word—do you love me ? ”

She smote her hands together.

“ Love you ! ” she said tremulously ; “ love you ! it is because I love you that I will not be your wife.”

“ If you love me,” he said passionately, “ all else matters nothing. What you have said makes no difference at all. Have I not known it all along ? In those old days in India I loved you—though I knew it not. Let us forget the past. My love shall be sufficient for you. Why wreck your life for the memory of another’s wrong-doing ? Why let the dark past stand between us and the bright future ? Remember only that I love you.”

She was swayed by the passion of his pleading. But she resisted still.

“ You do not understand,” she said in a whisper ; “ a man cannot understand what a woman feels who has lived through such a married life as mine was. It has broken me. One cannot suffer, as I have suffered, and keep that pure glory of womanhood which a woman should give to the man who loves her. No, Kenneth—go to some bright young

girl who has no past on which to dwell, into whose life the canker of sorrow has not entered. Go—and leave me—a sorrowful world-weary woman. Believe me, it will be better so."

They were beneath the shadow of the trees here. It was so dark he could scarcely see her face. But he could hear a sound of quiet weeping.

"Listen," he said; "what you urge me to do I have done already. Do you remember—you must remember—years ago in India, that a girl promised to be my wife? I thought her inexperienced of the world; certainly she had no past to dwell upon, no shadow of sorrow had touched her, probably she was incapable of sorrow. I thought that she loved me, I could have sworn that she did, yet, with my kisses still warm on her lips, with her vows still ringing in my ears, she threw me over without a scruple—you remember that *kala-jugah* incident at Elysium—you were with me at the time. You know that she jilted me for a higher bidder. I have lived that down. She is nothing to me now. She was never to me what you are. I love you, Madeleine, not with a boy's passion, a flame that flares up at night and burns itself out before morning—but with the unswerving love of a man who

loves, not only with his heart, but with his head. Do not let a mistaken notion of duty stand in the way of our happiness—for my happiness is in your keeping, to make or to mar, which you will. Tell me, Madeleine, which shall it be ?”

He could not see her face; the purple veil of the night hung between them. Her sobs had ceased, but he could hear her quickened breathing. Her resistance was ebbing fast.

He came nearer, and put his arms around her.

“ Which shall it be ?” he whispered again, his lips close to hers.

With a low cry of happiness, she nestled to his breast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FEW days later the visitors left Burwood, the Evelines being the last to go. The professor and Mrs. Eveline left for Switzerland, and Mimi and Jack had sailed for America. The place resumed its wonted calm.

It was not until they were alone again that Madeleine would allow Goring to tell Mrs. Abington what had passed between them.

“I cannot consent to be your wife,” she said to him, “until your mother knows all, and, only then, subject to her approval. To do otherwise would be a sorry return for her kindness to me. You must tell her all—all, you understand. And by her decision we will abide.”

So one day, when Madeleine was not by, Goring told his story. He told it quietly, concealing nothing, but giving his mother clearly to understand that his happiness depended on it.

The news was to Mrs. Abington a revelation.

Lookers-on see most of the game as a rule, and Goring's preference had been patent to all eyes but hers. She had seen nothing. Or if she had noticed anything, she put it down to the fact that they had been friends in India. She received the news with mingled feelings, in which disappointment largely entered. She was an amiable old woman, but her mental horizon was limited, and she had an overweening sense of the conventions of life. She had cherished ambitious views for her son. Anxious as she was to see him happily married, in her heart she did not think Madeleine a worthy match for him. Not that she had anything against Madeleine personally; far from it. She had been in daily contact with her for now more than a year, and the unwearying kindness which she had shown towards her, had caused Mrs. Abington to regard her, as she had told Mrs. Eveline, "almost as a daughter." But there is a good deal in that "almost," and however much she might have regarded Madeleine in the light of a daughter, she certainly had not viewed her as a possible daughter-in-law.

She had heard, partly from her own lips, partly from Mrs. Eveline, of the character and career of Captain Wortley Dampier, and though Madeleine

was the dupe and the victim, though no blame could be laid to her charge, yet Mrs. Abington could not help wishing her son's choice had fallen on some one other than the widow of Captain Dampier.

There was a spice of worldliness in her objection. But if she was worldly, she was also just. There were points to be urged on the other side. Madeleine was a gentlewoman by birth, nurture and instinct; and, admitting the worst, the fact remained that her late husband's family was a good one. There are black sheep in every family, and Madeleine's only fault was that she had been betrayed into marrying one of them. Then there was Kenneth's happiness, and for that she was anxious above all things. She remembered his unfortunate affair in India with Laline L'Estrange. That was done with; but if she thwarted him, might she not drive him from her again?

She looked at Kenneth. His face was flushed and eager with his pleading.

"I have been blind, I suppose," she said. "What you have told me is a great surprise. Have you thought what it all means? Is your mind quite made up?"

"Irrevocably. If Madeleine will not be my wife, and she will not unless you receive her as—as she should be received—I will not marry at all."

Mrs. Abington smiled faintly. She remembered having read these words, or something very like them, in his letters from India, three or four years ago.

Perhaps Goring guessed what was passing in her mind. The flush on his face deepened a little as he said :

"Don't think that this is the same sort of infatuation as before. That burnt itself out all the more quickly because it burnt so fiercely. With Madeleine it is different. I have known her for years. My love for her has been the growth of years. I have seen her under all circumstances. I have lived under the same roof with her. She is a woman one can love, and respect and honour as—well—as one should the woman who is one's wife."

"That is true," admitted Mrs. Abington. "I will not in any way oppose your wishes ; but still you must admit that there are drawbacks."

"Always that old story," he rejoined impatiently. "She married a scoundrel who treated her cruelly, and deserted her. Is that any fault of hers ?"

“No, it is not her fault. It is only a little unfortunate, perhaps, that my son should have fallen in love with the scoundrel’s widow.”

“I thought you were more generous.”

“Kenneth, it is best that I should say to you all that is in my mind. Having said it once, we will never refer to it again. That is the only drawback; it would not be wise to ignore it; but it would not be right to let it outweigh all else. Your mind is made up. It must be as you wish. What is anything beside your happiness?”

Goring kissed her heartily.

“That’s a good mother,” he said. “I knew you’d turn up trumps. Now we shall all be happy. There is only one thing I would say—the first advance must come from you—you know how sensitive Madeleine is, how much she feels—”

“You may trust me.”

She was not one to do things by halves. Madeleine came back by-and-by.

“Madeleine, dear,” said the old lady tremulously “come to me. Kenneth has been with me, telling me that we have one more link in common—we both love him.”

They were a happy party that evening—happy

in the quiet, undemonstrative way which deep joy gives. Nothing more was said. But the servants, who notice everything, noticed this, and discussed it fully among themselves. Julie, the French maid, tossed her head.

In deference to Madeleine's wish, things were to go on just the same for the present, and nothing was to be said until within a month of the wedding day. Mrs. Abington seconded her wishes; she wished to keep Madeleine with her as long as possible, and she knew that directly the engagement became public property it would hardly be possible for her to remain at Burwood.

The details were easily arranged. Madeleine was to remain at Burwood until the Evelines returned from Switzerland, and as soon as she left to join them at Cambridge the engagement was to be announced. They were to be married in November at Cambridge. There was nothing to be urged in favour of delay. Everything was settled, the honeymoon was to be a brief one, and they were to return to Burwood for Christmas.

CHAPTER XXX.

RAIN, rain everywhere ; the clouds seemed charged with it. There had been a continuous downpour all day. The roads were soaked through and through, and, unable to take in more, the water stood about in little pools on the surface. The water-butt in the inn yard was running over, the gutters were flooded. Yet the rain still descended, not in a torrent, but in a steady drizzle.

They were not doing much of a business at the Hope and Anchor, Burwood. It was a bad day for customers ; there was so much moisture without that people did not care to take more within.

The Hope and Anchor was a large rambling old inn, with interminable corridors, and numerous small, low-ceilinged rooms. It had done a roaring trade in the palmy days when the coaches used to stop on their way from London to Bath. It was a well-known house. Here King George had stopped to lunch on his way to "the Bath" ; here Queen

Charlotte had paused to change horses ; here Mrs. Thrale had tarried over a dish of tea ; here many others had lingered too—courtiers, politicians, wits, bloods—all making for the waters. But the advent of the iron horse had changed all this ; the old inn, dependent now on the custom of the place, which was half a village, half a town, was left stranded high and dry. Ichabod ! its glory had departed.

Presently the 'bus which had been sent to the station—a station planted a mile away from the village, after the manner of many country stations—to meet the afternoon train, came rumbling up to the inn door. The solitary passenger got out, and looked around him discontentedly at the drizzling rain. He was a strongly-built man of some forty years or thereabouts, rather over than under the middle height, with a face that might have been handsome had it not been for the dissipated look and shifty, restless eyes. The lower part of his face was concealed by a well-trimmed beard. He was well-dressed, neatly, not flashily. He had the outward appearance of a gentleman ; yet there was an indefinable something about him which hardly harmonised altogether with that much-abused designation.

The landlord, who might have served for a study of Falstaff, met him at the door, bowing obsequiously, and washing his hands, as someone has put it, with an invisible soap in an imperceptible water.

“Nice weather for ducks and green peas, sir,” he remarked cheerfully.

The stranger took no notice of the time-honoured pleasantry.

“Can I get rooms here?” he asked shortly.

“Yes, sir; certainly, sir.” The landlord’s face brightened. “Jim,” this to the boots, “bring in the gentleman’s things. What rooms would you be pleased to require, sir?” he asked, in his blandest accents.

“Oh, a bedroom and sitting-room joining one another, if you have them so; if not, I must take what I can get, I suppose.”

The landlord rang a bell, which clanged through the house with remarkable vigour.

“I think I have just the set you want, sir—most fortunate, I am sure—just vacant—gentleman went away only last night. This way, sir, if you please.”

And having led the way up the irregular stairs

he threw open the door of a room on the first floor.

“Humph,” said the stranger, looking around, “left them only last night, did he? I should have thought they had been vacant a month. However, they’ll do. Better light a fire, they smell rather musty.”

“Certainly, sir, a fire shall be lit at once; not that they are damp, sir—oh, dear no! But with such weather as this what can you expect? We have some other rooms downstairs if you would prefer them.”

“Oh, no, these will do; at least I think so. The bedroom communicates, I see. That is all right. If I don’t like them I can change, I suppose?”

“Certainly, sir; you have only to say the word. Might you be making a long stay?” the landlord inquired deferentially.

“I don’t know; depends how I like it—a week or so, perhaps; perhaps only a few days. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, for no particular reason, sir, only I happened to notice you had brought your fishin’ tackle with you. Capital trout-fishin’ here, sir, in the Shirwell.”

“ Yes, so I understand ; that is what I came for—and to be quiet. I suppose there’s plenty of fishing to be let ? ”

“ Well, sir, there’s some. I have a little myself, and very good it is too. But the upper part of the river is mostly preserved, and there’s none to let now that Sir Kenneth is back again. Last year the head keeper, who’s a friend of mine, would have given you some almost for the asking.”

“ Sir Kenneth ! What Sir Kenneth ? ” asked the stranger carelessly, looking out of the windows.

“ Sir Kenneth Goring, sir, of Burwood Hall.” He evinced some surprise at the question. “ He owns most of the property round here. Everyone in Berkshire knows of Sir Kenneth Goring, or rather of the family, for Sir Kenneth came into the place rather unexpectedly—so to speak. Burwood’s a fine place, sir, quite a show place—about a mile from here. Of a fine day you can see it from the windows—and the park—well, there isn’t a prettier park in England.”

“ Ah, I must have a look at it. You can manage that for me, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh, yes, sir. I was butler there for many years, in old Sir John’s time. Just now, the family being

at home, you couldn't see over the house ; but the park and gardens I am sure I could manage for you to see nicely. There's been grand doings up at the Hall lately, in honour of Sir Kenneth's return—a ball, and what not besides, and people coming and going quite like the old days when—”

“Ah,” said the stranger, breaking in upon the flood of reminiscences, “I see my traps have come up. Put them in the bedroom there.” This to the boots. “Thanks, I'd rather unpack myself.”

“Is there anything more I can do for you, sir ?” inquired the landlord.

“I think I'll have a brandy-and-soda, and,” calling after him, “by the way, have any letters come for me ?”

“I will see, sir ; what name, if you please ?”

“Major Williams.”

The landlord bowed with increased respect, and retired below.

“A real gentleman,” he said to his wife ; “took the rooms without a word, and never asked the price of anything. I shall let him the fishing, too, I expect.”

Presently he reappeared with a tray, which bore the brandy-and-soda and a letter.

“Only one, sir,” he said ; “came this morning.”

“Ah, thanks,” said the major, just glancing at the envelope and pouring out some brandy, “thanks — that will do.”

Left to himself, he broke the seal and read. It was only a few words—

“Meet me in the park this evening about six o’clock. Under the beech trees, by the north gate.

“Julie.”

“So far, so good,” he said to himself, twisting the note round his fingers. He struck a match and reduced the note to ashes. “Well, I hope this business won’t take long. Gad, what a hole to be landed in,” he muttered, looking round at the horse-hair furniture, faded curtains, hideous carpet, and more hideous wall paper, and the generally dingy appearance of the dreary room. “How the devil is one to kill the time ?”

He poked the fire savagely. Then he proceeded to lock the door, having first taken the trouble to ascertain whether there was anyone outside, and walked into the bedroom adjoining. He locked the door here again, examined the walls narrowly

all the way round, and pulled down the blind. At one end of the room, near the bed, was a large ponderous wardrobe of old-fashioned mahogany, with a substantial lock and key.

“That will do admirably,” he muttered.

His portmanteau and dressing-bag lay by the side of the bed. He lifted the latter—it seemed unusually heavy for its size—he unlocked it, and took out several bottles, brushes, and things which lay on the top. Then he opened his portmanteau, and brought out from the middle of his clothes an oblong box and a little case, which were wrapped up together. He looked at the latter for a moment reflectively.

“Ah, my friends, let us hope you will not be wanted,” he said.

He thrust both box and case together into the dressing-bag, shut it up with a snap, locked it, carried it to the wardrobe, shut the doors, locked them, and put the key in his pocket. After this he leisurely unpacked his portmanteau, carried a box of cigars and three or four novels into the sitting-room, unlocked the door and rang the bell.

The landlord answered it in person.

“I want to get a little dinner, about 7.30.”

“ Certainly, sir. What would you like ? ”

“ Oh, anything ; I leave that to you,” he answered, with the grand air of one who has not been accustomed to be worried about trifles. “ A little soup, fish, cutlet, a bird, anything you like. What time is it now ? ”

“ A little after five o’clock, sir.”

“ Ah ! ” looking at his watch, “ so it is. The rain seems to have left off. I think I shall go out presently for a little stroll—to see the church, you know, or the park you were telling me about. Which way does it lie ? ”

“ You take the road to your right, sir, when you get past the church. You can’t miss it. It’s about a mile from here to the principal entrance ; but there’s so many lodges. The nearest one to here is the north gate, only about half a mile ; but it isn’t much used now.”

“ Thanks, I think that will do. Straight along the road you say ? Ah ! and, landlord—”

“ Sir ? ”

“ Bring me the wine list when you come up again.”

• • • • •

Half an hour later the major sallied forth, and bent his steps along the muddy lane which led past the church. The rain had ceased for a while; but the air was pregnant with moisture, and the skies were grey and cloudy. At last he reached what was evidently the north gate; it was a disused lodge—disused, that is to say, except for foot-passengers. The cottage was probably tenanted; but the gate was locked, and the drive was grass-grown. Entering the park by a side gate the major stood for a moment and looked around. Then he made his way across the sodden grass to a beech-wood plantation a little to the right. There was no one about; the place seemed deserted. He hadn't gone far along the path before he espied, among the trees the flutter of a woman's dress. A moment later and Mrs. Abington's black-browed French maid came towards him.

She greeted him with effusion, and a flood of voluble French.

“So you have come at last,” she cried. “*Mon Dieu!* I thought you would never come.”

“Why, it's not six o'clock yet,” he answered, wilfully misunderstanding her.

“*Peste!*” she cried, with a gesture of impatience.

“I do not mean that. You know what I mean. Why have I been kept down in this dull ‘ole—that is how you say, is it not?—‘dull ‘ole’ all these months? I am *ennuyée*, bored to the death. Why did you not come before ?”

“Things do not always come off so quickly as you and I might wish, *ma petite*,” he rejoined complacently. “There was that affair up north to pull off, you know, and then that little business at Maidenhead—a narrow squeak that—it has been necessary to lie low ever since. However, this job is an easy one, I suppose. You and I can manage it all right without calling in anybody else, can’t we ? It’s worth doing, isn’t it ?”

“Worth doing! I should think so. You should see the diamonds. *Ciel!*—such stones. A week ago they gave a ball, and madame was covered with them. Ah! thought I, we shall ease you of some of those, *miladi*, before long. If you could have come then. But now, it is not so easy, we must wait a little; but I will tell you when. By-and-by it will be better. Just now it is *difficile*.”

“Oh, I can wait ! I have come prepared to wait. No good work was ever done in a hurry. Tell me, whom does the household consist of ?”

“Oh, there are many servants—but they matter not—they sleep far away in another wing—and sleep, *mon Dieu*, like the dead. Now that the guests have gone, they are few—only the old lady, Sir Kenneth, and her companion—she sleeps in the same corridor as madame; but Sir Kenneth is far away.”

“Well, the companion won’t give us much trouble.”

“I do not know, she is a *dame de compagnie*, a ‘sheep-dog’—as you say—and she is very watchful. She is no innocent—she. We must be on our guard. At times she looks at me as though she suspected something. *Peste!* I hate her, this English woman, with great cow-like eyes. And she is cunning too, for all her pretended goodness. She has set her cap at the baronet, and she will catch him too, for he is fool enough. Oh, yes! they will make a match; they think it is secret; but I know. I have watched them, and have seen them.”

“Well, that don’t matter to us. She is welcome to him, if we can only clear off with the swag. But look here, Julie, make sure this time. Don’t let there be any little *contretemps*, and don’t do anything before we are sure; mind that, or it may

go hard with us. That Maidenhead business has made me cautious. Just drop me a line when you are ready—Major Williams, you know—and I'll try and get a look round the house in the meantime. There will be no difficulty about my getting in, I suppose?"

"You may trust me for that. I open the drawing-room window, one flight of stairs, and, *voila!* there you are. I will send you a plan."

"Thanks, I shall be glad of it. Well, I must be making tracks now. It's getting late. Good-night."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. That was part of the business.

"When shall I see you again?" she asked, clinging to him.

"Well, I don't know. You see, it's not advisable for us to meet too often—we might be seen, and things would look suspicious."

"But I have seen so little of you lately."

"Well, we shall see plenty of one another later on, if we pull this off. We'll cut the whole concern and go off together. Now, don't go and get in one of your tantrums, or you'll spoil everything."

Tears stood in her eyes—tears of vexation and

baffled desire. But she clung to him still, and he had perforce to kiss the full red lips again. Her lips quivered on his.

“Always together, *toujours*,” she said softly. Then with sudden passion, “You will not play me false, *mon Dieu* ? If I thought so—”

“You needn’t think so,” he said, freeing himself from her at last. “What a little spitfire it is. You have known me long enough to trust me, I should think. Now—now I must be off. You can drop me a line when you want to see me again ; only remember what I told you.”

“I will remember,” she said.

And they parted.

“All the same, Mademoiselle Julie,” soliloquised the major, as he made his way back to the inn, “you needn’t think I am going to be such a fool as to hook myself up for life to a she-devil like you. Great Scot, no ! I know a trick worth two of that. Only let me pull the job off, and I’ll give her and the whole concern the go-by. I wish it were well over ; it sounds easy enough ; but one can never trust women. It’s playing with edge tools, you never know where you have them. Now, this

one, if she lost her temper, or her head, would be quite capable of blowing on the whole thing. I must humour her a little longer, and after. ”

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONE afternoon in early September, about a week later, Madeleine walked across the park to the rectory. She had a message from Mrs. Abington, and she had also something to do at the church. Goring had gone out shooting. She had not seen him since the morning.

It was a beautiful day, sunny and bright, but the air had that first freshness which tells of coming autumn. Madeleine felt very happy as she walked along. Everything helped to make her so. She looked years younger than the woman whom Mrs. Eveline had found beneath the linden trees at Baden a year ago. There was a lightness in her step, a brightness in her eye, a flush in her cheek, all of which spoke mutely of the joy within her.

The rectory, a large square house behind the church, wore an air of general neglect and untidiness. The garden gate sadly lacked a coat of paint, the shrubs were overgrown, the lawn uncared for,

and the hens evidently had been holding high revels on the flower plots. As Madeleine walked up the garden path she espied three of the rector's numerous olive branches, playing (what served for) tennis over a dilapidated net. Two younger ones were squatting on the rough grass alongside, and a couple more, twins evidently, were strapped down face to face in a perambulator. When she walked towards them, the whole brood turned and fled, except the twins, who set up a dismal howl at seeing themselves deserted. Madeleine pacified them with sundry offerings, and then went to the door. A great hulking boy was standing in the shabby hall, the first-born of this plentiful progeny. He greeted her with a sheepish grin. In reply to her inquiry as to whether his mother was at home, he said boorishly :

“I don't know ; she's up in the nursery, I think, but I'm not sure. I'll see.”

He went to the foot of the stairs and bawled, “Mother!” There was no reply, so he ran upstairs, and left Madeleine in the hall. The signs of slatternly housekeeping were visible here—in the dirty floor, the ragged curtains, and general untidiness. An odour compounded of the mid-day meal

and of burnt rags assailed her nostrils. She was conscious of sundry whisperings and scufflings, and of three or four children, with dirty pinafores and dirtier faces, peering at her over the banisters. These things were not new to her. So she waited patiently until a draggle-tailed maid-servant ran downstairs to say that Mrs. Jordan was at home.

“She’s a cleanin’ herself; she’ll be down d’reckly, if you please to walk in, ma’am,” said the drudge, throwing open the door of the drawing-room. This drawing-room was a sort of Bluebeard’s chamber to the children; they were excluded from it under fearful penalties.

The room had the unused air of the best parlour; one or two of Doré’s engravings graced the wall, the green rep chairs were arranged in conversational attitudes, and on the loo-table, amid divers wool-work abominations, reposed a bloated family Bible, a gaudily bound “Pilgrim’s Progress,” “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs,” and one or two numbers of the *Quiver*.

Mrs. Jordan came in presently. She was a flaccid, soulless woman, with a sodden complexion, a loose mouth, and watery eyes. The signs of the “cleaning” were not apparent, for her cap was awry, and her untidy dress was huddled on her squab figure. She

stooped habitually, as though weighed down, mentally and physically, by many children and much serving. Yet she had been young and pretty once. Now, she looked what she was, a mere drudge.

She greeted Madeleine with effusion and many apologies. Nothing had been announced, but in a village everything leaks out, and through the medium of servants' gossip Mrs. Jordan had more than an inkling of how matters stood between her visitor and Sir Kenneth. This gave an added graciousness to her manner. Like most women of her type (she was the daughter of a well-to-do retired grocer, and had come across the Reverend Septimus Jordan during his first curacy at Emanuel Church, Streatham), Mrs. Jordan had a profound reverence for "the powers that be." The future mistress of Burwood would not forget these little amenities when she came into her kingdom.

Madeleine gave her message ; it was a note from Mrs. Abington to ask if the rector and his wife would dine with them that evening.

"We shall be delighted," said Mrs. Jordan, her watery eyes brightening ; Mrs. Abington's dinners were oases in her life. Then her face clouded over. "But I must ask the rector," she said ; "I forgot.

He'll be in directly ; won't you wait ? It isn't easy for me to get away, you see," she said explanatorily, relapsing into her usual fretful whine. "The twins—the babies, I mean—are cutting their teeth—they're that fractious, and now that Miss Smith's away" (Miss Smith was the nursery governess, whose existence words fail to describe), "I've got such a lot to see to. Only one maid, and Algy going to school next week and all. Still, I should like to come."

Madeleine duly sympathised with her, and asked after the health of each member of the family in turn, not forgetting the two lots of twins. Mrs. Jordan waxed eloquent as she described their ailments. Her children and the parish gossip were the only two subjects on which it was possible for her to converse. Having at length exhausted her children and disburdened her grievances anent the whole eleven, from Algy's school bills down to the twin's teeth, she turned to the second item of her conversational programme.

"I suppose you have heard, Mrs. Dampier, about that Jemima Taylor—a pretty business, isn't it ? I always knew the creature would come to no good, strutting to church with feathers in her hat, and

carrying her nose in the air. The shameless minx !
And now you see what's come of it ! ”

Mrs. Jordan pursed up her loose mouth and sniffed the air with virtuous indignation, as became a clergyman's wife and the mother of eleven children.

“ Yes, I have heard,” said Madeleine sadly. “ Poor thing ! But we mustn't judge her harshly ; perhaps she has been more sinned against than sinning. In any case, the sin has brought its punishment.”

“ Really, Mrs. Dampier ! ” protested the rector's wife shrilly. She was quite roused. A malevolent gleam shone in her eyes. To this virtuous matron, the frail Jemima had sinned beyond forgiveness, and to pity her was to condone her offence. But she remembered that Madeleine was probably going to be Lady Goring. “ Well, well,” she said, subsiding into a professional drawl, “ we must try our best to reclaim the creature for the Lord's sake. The rector has gone down to exhort her this afternoon. Ah ! ” she exclaimed, as she espied a portly figure coming up the path, “ here he is.”

The rector greeted Madeleine with marked affability. He used to patronise her when she first came. The reason of his change of manner did not

strike her. She pitied the wife, but she was conscious of an instinctive dislike of Mr. Jordan. Mrs. Abington, who noticed it, used to say it was because their church views were different. It lay deeper than that.

The rector sat himself down on one of the green rep chairs and wiped his heated brow. He was a gross-looking man, with oily red hair, protruding eyes, a flabby face, and moist lips. His manner was a curious compound of arrogance and servility. He had taken holy orders through the back door, and on the strength of two years' indifferent training at a third-rate theological college, he dogmatised on all things in the heaven above and the earth beneath. He was not (it is scarcely necessary to say) a type of the average Anglican clergyman; he had much more in common with the illiterate nonconformist minister, whom, in appearance and doctrine, he more closely resembled.

As he sat there nursing one fat leg over the other, his wife timidly gave him Mrs. Abington's invitation. Madeleine seconded her.

The rector licked his lips.

"I shall be very happy to avail myself of Mrs. Abington's invitation," he said, addressing Made-

leine, and ignoring his wife. "I am afraid my wife cannot leave the children; I must ask Mrs. Abington to excuse her."

Mrs. Jordan's face fell, and Madeleine, seeing it, insisted that Mrs. Abington particularly wished to see Mrs. Jordan, and would be most disappointed if she did not come. At last the rector was fain to give a grudging consent. Truth to tell, he preferred to dine out without his wife. He had come to regard her as a sort of upper servant, minus wages, and plus children.

"I have been to admonish that unhappy girl, Jemima Taylor," he said presently, when the matter of the dinner had been settled. He put his plump fingers together and cast his eyes upward. "A grievous spectacle," he continued unctuously, "to see one so young and yet so depraved. A sad instance of the triumph of the flesh. How carnal we are—how very carnal."

Mrs. Jordan murmured an echo.

"Yes," said Madeleine, flushing a little, "Mrs. Jordan was telling me that you had been there." She was interested in the girl, a daughter of one of the labourers on the estate. "Could I—could anyone—do anything?" she said timidly. "Mrs.

Abington is very grieved. Perhaps if I went to see her, I—”

“ I beg you will do nothing of the kind, Mrs. Dampier,” said the rector severely, “ or Mrs. Abington either. Your patronage in such a case would be misconstrued into an encouragement of vice.”

“ I had no intention of patronising,” corrected Madeleine quietly.

The rector waved the correction aside, and continued :

“ I found her most impenitent,” he said, his voice getting quite angry. “ I went to admonish her in the Lord, to pluck her as a brand from the burning, to convince her of her shame. I found her stubborn and sullen—in fact, her frame of mind was that of a hardened sinner. Despite all my exhortations she refused to give the name of the father of her child, and her mother actually endeavoured to shield her. A bad lot, I fear, a very bad lot ! ”

“ A bad lot, indeed,” echoed the wife of his bosom, stirred out of her wonted torpor by the recital of Jemima’s enormities. “ The bold-faced jig —she ought to be made to tell,—be shunned by all

Christian women—and men too. I hope you will not go there again, Septimus," she added, with an apprehensive glance.

"I permit of no interference with the exercise of my pastoral ministrations, Maria," loftily rebuked the rector. "I must wrestle with this sinful woman."

Mrs. Jordan subsided.

"I am very sorry to hear what you say," said Madeleine, distressed. "I am sorry for the parents, too—but—but don't you think we may judge the girl too harshly? Perhaps if she were approached quietly. After all, she is very young and very ignorant."

"Ignorant!" ejaculated Mrs. Jordan, unable to contain herself. "Why, she was in my class in the Sunday school—the hussy!"

"Silence, Maria!" said the rector, with a wave of his hand. "I quite enter into your feelings, my dear Mrs. Dampier," he continued. "But as a shepherd of souls I must remind you that leniency is apt to be misunderstood in a case like this. The woman must be made an example of in the interest of morality."

"But what do you propose to do?" asked

Madeleine. "Surely the sin has brought its own punishment."

"Get her out of the parish as quickly as possible that she may not contaminate the rest," rejoined the rector; "get rid of the whole brood, father and mother and all; that will be the best way. I must speak to Sir Kenneth about it to-night; his agent should give them notice to quit at once."

"I am sure Sir Kenneth will permit nothing of the kind," cried Madeleine, flushing. She was stung by the injustice of the thing, and urged on by a sense of repulsion against the smug Pharisee in front of her. "Why should the whole family suffer because of this girl's wrong-doing? A half-witted father, an ailing mother, half a dozen little brothers and sisters, all to be turned out of house and home because of this— Oh! it would be cruel."

"If one member suffer, all the other members suffer with it," said the rector dogmatically. "That is the Word."

"And the mother tried to shield the disgusting creature," chorussed Mrs. Jordan.

"And what mother worthy of the name would not?" asked Madeleine, thoroughly roused. "Ask

your own heart, Mrs. Jordan. After all, the poor girl has never had a fair chance. What can you expect when you think of her parents and her surroundings? Why, the cottage they live in is unfit for human habitation. The sleeping accommodation is disgraceful: only two rooms for a whole family, and two lodgers. It is one of those which Sir Kenneth has ordered to be pulled down. He will build new cottages all over the estate in time. How can you expect modesty, or decency, or morality to flourish in such inhuman homes? And as for turning them out on the roadside—surely you cannot mean it; it would only drive the girl to hopelessly vicious courses, and punish her helpless relations. Would that be Christ-like? He who had pity on the penitent Magdalene would have pity on her."

She paused, her face was flushed, her eyes shining; her feelings had caused her to say more than she had meant to say. Mrs. Jordan stared aghast in speechless indignation. The rector reddened under the implied rebuke, and glared at his wife, not because she provoked him, but from habit, as the usual recipient of his wrath. To himself he thought that the companion was doing the

Lady Bountiful full soon. He foresaw trouble ahead. Aloud he said stiffly, with a shocked expression:

“I must really be allowed to know what is best for the moral welfare of my parish, Mrs. Dampier. To hear such views is, indeed, grievous to me. But we will waive it; it is a subject hardly to be discussed with ladies.”

At that moment there was a sound of wheels outside, and a gaudy carriage and pair pulled up at the rectory gate.

“Dear me!” exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, in a flutter, “there’s Lady Scrawley, I do declare. Septimus—”

But Septimus had already waddled to the door. He returned a minute later, and obsequiously ushered in Lady Scrawley. That good lady was in the habit of paying occasional patronising calls upon the parsons’ wives whose parishes were within a radius of the Scrawley domain. It gratified her sense of importance for one thing, and it enabled her to pick up the gossip of each parish for another. Her especial object just now was to find out all that the Jordans could tell about the rumoured engagement between Sir Kenneth and Mrs. Dampier.

The rector and his wife smiled and grovelled. Lady Scrawley was pleased to respond to their homage from her lofty level ; that is to say, she asked a few questions about the children *en bloc*. But she didn't listen to their answers, an irritating trick, which she fondly imagined to be good breeding.

"Dear me !" she ejaculated, when Mrs. Jordan was telling her of the twins, "I had forgotten them ; what a lot there are !"

Mrs. Jordan assented with a sigh.

"An heritage and gift that cometh from the Lord," quoted the Reverend Septimus piously. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

"Humph," ejaculated Lady Scrawley. Then she turned her back upon her host and hostess, and began to chat amiably to Madeleine. If the person was to marry Sir Kenneth Goring, it would be just as well to take time by the forelock, and resign herself to the inevitable. When one has half a dozen unmarried daughters, one cannot afford to be too particular, and Burwood would doubtless be a lively house under the new rule. But Lady Scrawley could not forgive her for carrying off the best match in the county.

“Tell me, Mrs. Dampier,” she said presently, “are you one of the Blankshire Dampiers? We used to know them.”

“My husband was a cousin of theirs,” said Madeleine, colouring a little.

“Really!” exclaimed Lady Scrawley; her pet ejaculation. “I thought there must be *some* connection. Can you tell me how poor, dear old Sir Anthony is? He was very poorly when we were at Homburg last summer.”

She hadn’t the faintest interest in his health. She hadn’t even a bowing acquaintance with him, but she wanted, if possible, to corner Madeleine, and she did it.

“I cannot. I have never met Sir Anthony.”

“Never met! dear me, how strange. He is the head of your family, is he not?”

“The head of my late husband’s family,” corrected Madeleine. She felt she must say something, for the rector and his wife were all eyes and ears. “My husband was one of Sir Anthony’s many nephews, but they were not on very friendly terms—and the Dampiers are a large family, you know.”

“Why, you don’t mean to say that your husband

was Captain Wortley Dampier of the 111th?" cried Lady Scrawley.

She knew that it was so perfectly well; she had ferreted it out as soon as she heard the rumour of Madeleine's possible relations with Sir Kenneth. But she wished to convey the fact of her knowing it to her victim.

"You are quite right," replied Madeleine, turning pale, and wondering how much this terrible woman knew. Then her innate frankness came to her aid. "The subject is a very painful one to me," she said; "we will not talk of it, if you please."

"Oh, certainly; I quite understand," said the other, baffled for the nonce, in a tone that was intended to be sympathetic, but which only succeeded in being spiteful.

Madeleine took her leave soon afterwards. She had caught the accent of malice in Lady Scrawley's words, and she felt sure, that as soon as her back was turned, the rector and his wife would probably be entertained with a highly-embroidered account of her late husband's short-comings. "Not that they had much embroidery though," she thought to herself bitterly. She felt sick at heart. It was hard to be hunted down like this. Was the past never

to be laid to rest? Then she thought of Kenneth, and the thought brought her comfort.

The church was only a little way from the rectory. She soon reached it. It was a little Norman building, full of memorials of the Goring family. In a side chapel there were many effigies of Gorings dead and gone, and the windows of the apse were filled with heraldic glass.

Madeleine's errand here was to replenish the altar vases, a weekly task which she enjoined upon herself. The rector denounced flowers as an "innovation," and would have abolished them altogether, but the fear of offending Mrs. Abington kept him in check. The same influence made him consent to a surpliced choir, and one or two other vain ceremonies.

Madeleine found a basket of flowers there; it had been left by the gardener. She lost no time in setting to work, and taking the vases into the vestry, filled them with fresh flowers. She replaced them on the altar shelf, and her labour of love was done.

Yet she lingered awhile. The annoyance occasioned by the rector's bigotry, and Lady Scrawley's malice, died away. She only felt joy and thankful-

ness for the blessing of a good man's love. The quiet of the holy place appealed to her like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Her heart was very full, and she could not refrain from offering up a thankful prayer for all the happiness that had come into her life.

Then she passed out of the dimly lighted church to the sunshine without.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE clock in the grey square tower, around which the swallows were wheeling in the sunny air, chimed five o'clock as Madeleine came out of the church. There was no need to hurry home ; dinner was not until eight. She thought she would walk a little way. At the end of a grassy lane a circuitous path led up a hill, from the top of which a fine view could be obtained of the country around. She resolved to climb it. A quarter of an hour's brisk walking brought her to the top of the hill. She sat down and looked over the village beneath, and the outstretched dale and woodland. Her eyes travelled over all, and then rested on the house of which she was soon to be the mistress. It could be seen very plainly standing forth against its background of trees.

She could not forbear a thrill of pride as she looked. She loved Goring for his own sake ; she would have married him as readily—more readily

—if he had not an acre of land to bless himself with. But though the poetic aspect of love and poverty may charm in poetry, the prosaic side of wealth and the things which wealth brings have their charm in fact.

A retrospective sense stole over Madeleine, as she thought of the change which had taken place in her life. She fell into a happy reverie.

The sound of children's voices echoing upward from the village below aroused her, and she began to retrace her steps down the hill. Turning to the right, she walked along the ferny deep-banked lanes to the north gate of the park. It was only the second week of September, but the "fire of the autumn" had begun to blaze upon the hedgerows. It was visible in the tangled masses of the bryony, causing the green berries to redden and gleam like coral, it was browning the hazel-nuts, purpling the blackberries and deepening the carmine of the hips and haws.

Madeleine came to the north gate. It was as deserted as usual.

Instead of following the grass-grown drive, which wound about a good deal, she determined to take a shorter cut across the park. To do this she had to

go through a beech-grove, and a quaint secluded nook known as the "rostrum," a place where nature had been aided by art, and which had been the scene of a woodland play. The trees were garlanded with ivy, there was a plateau of turf, and terraced seats of turf, shadowed by the background of trees. It was such a spot as Titania and Oberon might have chosen for their revels.

But it was tenanted by two persons very different to Titania and Oberon just now.

As Madeleine came near she saw that a man and a woman were there, apparently in close conversation.

The woman caught a sight of Madeleine's dress between the smooth boles of the beeches. She gave an alarm, and, with a few hasty words of farewell, disappeared among the trees.

Madeleine was too far off to distinguish faces, but the figure, and something about the walk, told her that it was Mrs. Abington's French maid.

"So Julie has been keeping a tryst," she thought.
"It is an ideal trysting-place."

The man, suddenly abandoned, paused for a minute irresolutely, and looked around him for means of avoiding a meeting. But there was no

way of escape, unless he followed Julie across the park. He apparently thought the better of that, and, pulling his hat a little lower over his brows, he strolled at a leisurely pace down the path, switching the air with his stick as he came along.

He came slowly between the smooth boles of the beeches towards Madeleine. A bend of the path concealed him a little, but she noted with some surprise that he was not a game-keeper, nor a servant, as she had at first supposed, but that he had the dress and bearing of another class. As she looked, something about the gait, and something in the carriage of the head, recalled to her memory one whom she was always striving to forget. A vague fear tightened around her heart. She shook it off.

“Absurd ; it cannot be,” she said, below her breath.

The man came nearer and nearer, his feet falling quietly on the moss-grown path, his eyes bent upon the ground. The terror gained upon her every moment. Suddenly he looked up. His eyes met hers with a look of blank amaze.

God in heaven ! Had the sea given up its dead ? The man before her was her husband.

She knew him at once, despite his beard, despite his altered appearance. Her fear deepened into certainty. She stopped, paralysed with astonishment, unable to move or to fly. . . . A mist swam before her eyes . . . the figure became blurred and indistinct . . . the path seemed to rock beneath her feet, the trees to sway from side to side. The basket which she had been carrying dropped from her hands. She would have fallen had she not caught hold of a tree for support. She fell back against it and cowered there with sheer physical terror.

The astonishment on Dampier's face was second only to that on her own. He looked at her with dumb amazement.

The stillness was only broken by her short, quick breaths.

Dampier was the first to recover himself; his surprise was surprise merely, and great as it was, it contained nothing of her fear. He pushed his hat back from his brows.

“Well,” he said with a deep breath, “this is a queer go!” He looked at her again and laughed low, a laugh which the wildness of his eyes belied. “So,” he continued, “at last we have met again.”

The sound of his voice vibrated a chord in her memory. A shiver ran through her. She put out her hands as though to ward him off, but no sound came from her white lips.

As Dampier looked at her the echo of his hollow laughter died away.

“ Well,” he said, with ill-assumed jocularity, “ this isn’t a very affectionate greeting for a wife to give her husband—after all these years too. You don’t look overjoyed. But—I forgot—I frightened you. You thought I was food for the sharks—like the rest of them. But I’ve turned up again, you see.”

Her eyes met his. There was something more than fear in them—an agony of physical repulsion. She made no movement and no sign to show that she had heard him; her hands were still thrust out. Save for her quickened breathing, she was motionless.

“ By —— !” he cried, with an oath, “ don’t look at me like that. Won’t you speak? or must I find a way to make you? ”

It was the look in her eyes which enraged him. His face grew dark.

"Come—out with it," he said brutally, coming a step nearer. "What are you doing here?"

The gesture which went with his words roused her. Her arms fell to her side, the blood ebbed slowly back to her face. It was no disembodied spirit which she had to face, but something tangible, far more terrible. Yet in this, the most awful moment of her life, some force within her rose to her call. The very desperation of the situation sustained her and blotted out all else. Her dominant thought was to escape from him. She set her quivering lips.

"I deny your right," she said, "to ask me that question. What right have you? What I do is no concern of yours."

"Hoity-toity," he said. "What right have I? The right of a husband, of course."

The word "husband" struck her like a blow. Her soul rose in revolt. With an effort, she beat down the more passionate protest which rose to her lips.

"You have forfeited that right," she said steadily. "I need not remind you when, or how."

He looked at her as she stood there, pale and still, and he cursed her in his heart. Again, as on that night at Elysium when he had left her, a

sense of impotence stole over him. What was the power in this tender woman which he could not break ?

“ Come,” he said in a blustering tone, “ answer my question. I will have it. What are you doing here ? ”

She did not falter.

“ What are *you* doing here ? ” she said meaningly.

“ I—” he said, and stopped a second in evident confusion. Then he continued, with an ill-assumed air of bravado, “ Looking for my wife, of course. What else should a man be doing, when he has lost sight of her for two or three years ? ”

“ It is false ! ” she said. “ The look on your face, your manner, your words—all tell me that until a few minutes ago you had no thought of me. But it does not matter. I only wish to convey to you that it would be wiser to leave me alone. Let me go.”

She made an effort to pass him. But he threw himself in her path.

“ Stop,” he said. “ Not so fast, my fair one. You and I have a little account to settle before we part.”

She looked around her in despair. There was no one in sight. They were alone. There were

only the trees, and beyond them the park, and the deer browsing in the sunlit, evening calm.

“Have I not suffered enough?” she cried, turning to him with a sudden passion of appeal? Have you no pity? Oh! let me go—let me go! I am unnerved—broken. I cannot think—cannot breathe. I must have time to think. Do you know what this means to me? Till to-day, I thought you dead.”

“I know you did,” he said with a coarse laugh; “but I’m alive, you see.” In proportion as she lost her nerve he gained his. He paused for a moment reflectively, his mind rapidly taking in the situation. A thought struck him. “You needn’t put yourself out about it so much,” he continued, in a more conciliatory tone. “There’s no great harm done, if only you do as I tell you. I don’t want to interfere with you. I’m quite ready to die over again—if we can come to a satisfactory understanding. No doubt you are wishing me dead now.”

“No,” she said wearily. “I neither wish nor care. I only wish that I were dead myself, since you are alive; that is all.”

She looked around her in a dull, hopeless way.

It seemed a different world to that which she had looked upon a little time ago. For her the sun had ceased to shine, the birds to sing, the brightness had faded—a great darkness had come, shutting out light, and life, and love. The darkness would henceforth be with her evermore. Through all, she was conscious of his voice speaking; but the words seemed far away.

“That is nonsense,” he was saying; “the world is big enough for both of us. I don’t want to get in your way. You must admit I have kept pretty well out of it the last two years; and I should have done so, if luck or the devil had not thrown you across me to-day. I don’t want to interfere with you, if you’ll only be reasonable. I suppose you are wondering how I managed to give ‘em the slip so neatly at Aden. Well, it was very simple.”

He paused, expecting her to make some comment; but she made none. She was looking straight before her; her eyes had in them a far-off look. She was thinking of something else; trying to collect her scattered thoughts. That this man had come back from the dead was the one stupendous fact which for the moment overshadowed all the rest. How it had come about she neither knew,

nor cared to know. Yet he seemed to find a certain grim satisfaction in telling her all the same.

“Yes,” he continued, smiling to himself at the recollection, “it was a very neat job, but risky—very risky. I had a pretty shrewd idea when I went on board at Colombo, that—well, that a friend or two might be wanting to see me at Aden; and, as I didn’t want to see them, in spite of possible sharks I quietly dropped overboard the night before we came into port. It was a dark night, there was nobody about; the boat was going about fourteen knots, and I could see the lights of a native craft flickering in the distance. I swam out to her; they picked me up—thought I had fallen overboard. She was a smuggling felucca bound for Suez. They didn’t ask many questions, so I lay low along with them for a time, and when things had quieted down a little I got clear and came Home. I had taken care to line my belt against a rainy day, and since I came back—well,” with a shrug of his shoulders, “I’ve let my beard grow for one thing, and changed my name for another. Captain Dampier is dead, and Major Williams reigns in his stead.”

He stopped again, and waited for her to speak.

Outwardly she seemed scarcely to hear what he was saying. But she had heard every word. She was picturing the scene to herself as he went on—the tropical darkness of the night, the swift-going steamer rushing through the water, the throb throb of the screw, the phosphorescent flashes from the ship's sides, the bobbing light of the felucca, the man swimming towards her. Yes—it was all possible enough, as he had said—and yet—the possibility of it had never dawned upon her before. Had it not? Had there not, now and again, swept across her dreams, across her waking hours, as shadows sweep over a summer's day, the vague fear that something of the kind might be, that some evil, indefinable, intangible, was awaiting her? What was this but the dream casting its shadow before? And now the dream had become a hideous reality.

Dampier watched her narrowly. Her silence irritated him; it was unnatural. He could make nothing of it.

“Now,” he said harshly, “let me hear a little about yourself. How did you come here—living

with that fellow Goring of all people? Hardly by accident, I take it. Damnation! will you speak? You remember I used to find a way to make you?"

"That way has gone," she said, undaunted by the covert menace in his words. "What if it be my turn now? What if I were as pitiless as you?"

He looked at her a little uneasily. Perhaps she knew more than he thought. He was beginning dimly to comprehend that he had a different woman to deal with now.

"There is no occasion for us to quarrel," he said, in a more conciliatory tone, "nor do I want to bandy words. We'd better stick to the point. Let us come to terms."

He struck his stick on the ground to emphasise his words.

"Terms!" she echoed, recoiling from him. "There are no terms possible between you and me."

"We shall see about that," he said, with an ugly look, stung by the contempt in her voice. "You have your little plans, so have I. If you wish to carry them out you must strike a bargain, my Lady

Goring. Ah ! I thought that was the game," for she started visibly. " You see, I know more about you than you think. Don't try it on with me. It's a bit rough on you, I admit. It is rather hard on the poor companion who is going to wed the wealthy baronet to have her husband turn up again like the villain in a stage-play. Still that is a little difficulty which can be arranged if you—"

" Stop !" she gasped ; " for God's sake, stop ! "

His words brought the situation before her in all its horror ; the contrast between this coarse brute and his sordid schemes, and her honest, true-hearted lover and the gracious surroundings of her life, struck her with full force. The cup of her happiness was dashed from her lips. This man was her *husband*, he and none other, until death should part them. Ah ! if death would only bring oblivion. The air seemed polluted by his presence ; her heart almost ceased its beating.

" What is it you want with me ? " she faltered. " Tell me, and let me go. Money—I have but little, but all I have—here," and she held out her purse. " Take it and let me go. I will

send you all I have—all the rest—only, let me go."

He thrust the purse aside, a faint flush on his face.

" Bah ! " he said, " I don't want your pocket-money ; keep it. I fly for higher game than that." He felt no pity for the woman before him in her agony of entreaty. " So you are coming to your senses at last. You might have known that these high and mighty airs won't go down with me. What I have to say is this—I know your plans ; I don't want to interfere with them. If you have hooked the fellow you had better marry him. I don't want to claim you, and your secret will be safe with me—only you must make it worth my while. When you are Lady Goring you will be able to—"

He broke off, silenced by the change in her face. All sign of weakness and faltering disappeared as the true meaning of his proposition dawned upon her. She turned upon him transformed.

" How dare you say these things to me ? " she cried. " Do you think for one moment I would listen to such infamy ? This meeting is timely—I shall live to thank God for it—in that, at least, it

will save me from wrecking, unintentionally, the happiness of an honest man. Do you think that I should be such a fool—aye, such a fool—as to stoop to this treachery, and place myself in your power? No, hear me.” He was about to speak. “I defy your threats. It is not you who can dictate terms now, but I. I know you, whom and what you have been, what you are. I know not what evil work you are plotting with the woman whom I saw here just now, but as sure as Heaven is above me, if you do not leave this place to-night I will give information about you—cost what it may. I will face all the shame, all the dishonour, everything, rather than you should molest me again. Now let me go.”

He shrank back at her words. He was staggered at the threat she held over him. A bully, he was a coward when faced; she had the whip-hand of him. She must be silenced somehow. He moved towards her with a threatening gesture, but before he translated it into action she had fled past him, and, disappearing among the bushes, was gone.

“By Jove!” he said to himself, looking after her, “she means it too. It’s no use following her; she might give alarm—I pushed her too far. She

knew more than I thought. There's no time to be lost. Julie was right. Whatever is to be done must be done to-night. Great Scot! I wish I was well out of the whole business."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

How Madeleine got home she never knew. Excitement kept her up; terror lent wings to her feet. As she neared the house and saw that there was no fear of pursuit, her steps slackened. She had sufficient presence of mind to collect her scattered thoughts, and struggle to regain some outward appearance of calm.

“Tell Mrs. Abington,” she said to the butler, whom she met in the hall, and who noticed, she could see, that there was something amiss, “that I have a headache, and that I am going to lie down until dinner. Please see that she has my message at once.”

Madeleine reached her room, locked the door, and, throwing herself upon the bed, lay there prone.

The September day faded, the trees threw long shadows across the park, the sun went slowly

down behind the hills, but still Madeleine remained motionless, her face buried in the pillows, trying to shut out sound and light, trying to think what to do for the best. At present she could not think coherently ; her brain was in a whirl. She could hardly realise it yet. She was like one who has received a physical blow ; her senses were numbed for the time. By-and-by they would quicken again, and then the agony would come. At present one fact only beat upon her brain. Her husband was alive ! He had come back, and with his coming all happiness had died out of her life.

The iron entered into her soul. In this dark hour she prayed for death—only death, to come and bring forgetfulness.

She was aroused at last by a light tapping at the door. She started up, and, smoothing down her hair, went to the door and opened it. On the threshold stood Julie. She gave a swift, furtive glance at Madeleine's white face.

“ Mrs. Abington has sent me to madame,” she said suavely, “ to inquire how she is. Mrs. Abington is *désolée* to hear of madame's indisposition, and

wishes to know if there is anything she can do?"

Her cat-like eyes wandered round the room when she finished speaking; but she stood there demure, almost servile in her manner. She looked altogether oblivious of Madeleine having seen her in the park.

Madeleine was determined to allude to it. She had always felt an instinctive suspicion of the woman, and the suspicion to-day had taken shape. In some way, she knew not in what degree, she suspected that Julie was connected with her husband's appearance at Burwood. But she could not tax her with it directly.

"There is nothing, thank you," she said coldly. "Give my thanks to Mrs. Abington, and tell her it is nothing much. I overtired myself a little, I think—the sun was too hot. I shall be down to dinner. Stay, Julie—one moment." The maid was about to depart. "Was it not you whom I saw talking to someone in the park this afternoon?"

A sudden flash came into the Frenchwoman's eyes.

"*Mais oui*, madame," she said insolently, "and why?"

“Only,” said Madeleine, regarding her steadily, “I know something of the man, and I am sure that he is here for no good purpose. I shall deem it my duty to warn Sir Kenneth.”

A curious expression, half fear, half contempt, flitted over Julie’s face, and an angry retort rose to her lips. But she thought better of it. She threw up her hands with a gesture of disclaimer.

“Is it possible?” she exclaimed, with a change of tone. “I know not the man—he is a stranger to me, who stopped and asked the way. Nothing more, I assure madame.”

It was a palpable lie. The vindictive gleam in the woman’s eyes contradicted her words as she spoke them. Madeleine was baffled; she had nothing but suspicion to go upon.

“I am glad to hear it,” she said coldly. “That will do.”

Julie saw her advantage, and followed it up.

“I know nothing of him,” she reiterated, with elaborate impertinence, “and madame apparently knows much. But it is to Mrs. Abington, and not to madame that I am accountable, and madame should remember she is not miladi yet. *Un ami de madame ! Hélas ! C'est bien drôle.*”

With a toss of her head she slammed the door and went away.

A hot flush burned in Madeleine's face at the insolent words. Julie had drawn the bow at a venture and the arrow had sped home.

The incident had one good effect; it roused Madeleine from her stupor. She must act, and act at once. She could not afford to indulge in the luxury of grief just now. By-and-by there would be time enough. The thought made her shudder. "Oh, God," she moaned, "how am I to drag out all the weary years which are to come?" Her life seemed to stretch out before her, an arid waste, loveless, joyless, hopeless. It was a terrible moment; the past had for her nothing but sadness, the future fear. But the present—the present, what was she to do in the present? There was no time to be lost. She would have to go away somewhere by herself again, hide herself and her misery from everyone whom she had known and loved; above all, she must hide from her husband.

In the park, when driven to bay, and stung by the infamy of his proposition, she had defied him, and had spoken bold words. But now that the excitement was past, her old terror of him resumed

its sway. She was only a woman, with all a woman's weakness. If the worst should come to the worst she knew, in her heart, that she could not do as she had threatened. After all he was the father of her dead child. No, her only safety lay in flight.

For the moment her courage almost gave way. But the sound of the dressing-gong roused her to the need of action, and warned her, too, that she had need of all her courage.

There must be no suspicion of anything amiss ; there must be no scandal, no open rupture. She must steal away quietly and break the truth to Kenneth later on. In the meantime she must play her part. She must go down and meet them all as if nothing had happened, and smile and smile until her lips ached, and all the while this secret horror gnawing at her heart.

It was a terrible ordeal. Could she face it ? Yes ; it was for Kenneth's sake.

She looked anxiously at her face in the glass. It was pale, and the signs of suffering showed under her eyes, and round the corners of her mouth. But she had not wept. The agony she was going through had found no relief in tears ; it seemed to

dry up all lesser emotion. But she must try to hide the traces of her misery. She had no geranium-petals to call back the truant colour to her cheeks, after the fashion of Rhoda Broughton's heroine, but she had a little rouge against emergencies—what woman has not? She dressed herself with more than usual care, put on her prettiest gown, fastened a knot of flowers at her bosom, and went downstairs, with every nerve braced to carry her through.

It was made a little easier to her from the fact that they were not dining alone. She found the rector and his wife already arrived; the Reverend Septimus Jordan was never late to dinner, and a neighbouring squire had dropped in also, a young fellow with whom Goring had been shooting. Madeleine purposely went into the drawing-room late, just before dinner was announced. In the softened lamplight no signs of her mental suffering were visible on her face. Her manner was a little quieter than usual, but her headache accounted for that, and she met Mrs. Abington's inquiries and Sir Kenneth's solicitude with a smile in which they saw nothing unusual. Yet there are some smiles which are sadder than tears.

Goring had, of course, to take in Mrs. Jordan. Madeleine fell to the lot of Mr. Sharpshott, Mrs. Abington bringing up the rear with the rector. The young squire did not find his companion very conversational, but she was a good listener, and threw in a word when necessary. She asked him about his day's sport, and listened to him with what was apparently great attention, as he expatiated on the way in which he had managed to pot that last little brown bird in the Hillside covert just as the light was fading. Then they, or rather he—if she was a little *distracte* he didn't notice it—talked about cubbing, which had not long begun, and the prospects of the hunting season. Altogether they managed to get through dinner admirably, at least he thought so, until Madeleine was startled by hearing Mrs. Jordan's peevish voice say something. She was relating to Mrs. Abington the village gossip, having at last worked through the whole of her progeny.

“And I saw your French maid talking to a man the other day in the park. You see she has a follower like the rest of them.”

They were sitting over dessert; the servants had left the room.

"I think you must have been mistaken," rejoined Mrs. Abington. "She is a stranger here, and knows no one. But it might have been a chance meeting."

"Oh! well, they were together some time, and I must say they didn't part like strangers." And Mrs. Jordan folded her mitten hands with the air of one who could say much, and she would. "It was one afternoon last week; I was going across the park to leave a tract on that unhappy creature Jemima Taylor—I beg your pardon, I ought not to have mentioned her—and just by the north lodge I saw them, close to the rostrum."

"The rostrum is a capital place for anything of that kind," laughed Goring. "Julie must have a sense of the fitness of things."

"Yes, indeed," went on Mrs. Jordan, now fairly under weigh. It was characteristic of this estimable matron that the faults and failings of other women were the only subject, outside the family circle, which could move her to lengthened speech. "What was extraordinary about it—I shouldn't have noticed it otherwise, all maids have followers, I fear, though we do not permit it at the rectory—was that it was not a person of her own class, but

that Major Williams, you know, who has been staying at the Hope and Anchor."

"I have never heard of him," said Mrs. Abington.

"I am informed," put in the rector ponderously, frowning his wife into silence, "that he has been there for the last week or ten days ; he has taken Landlord Weekes' fishing. I don't know him myself except by sight ; he has not been to church. He has the cut of an army man, and there is something about him which savours of ungodliness. Still, I called on him in the exercise of my pastoral office ; he was not at home, nor has he taken any notice of my visit."

Mr. Jordan heaved a fat sigh at this slight to the cloth, and helped himself to another glass of port.

"Strange I have never come across him," said Goring, pealing a peach.

The rector ogled his port with a bibulous eye.

"He keeps a good deal indoors," he said. "Landlord Weekes tells me that he smokes and drinks all day. The amount of whisky he has consumed has been appalling. Sad—very sad ; soldiers are, indeed, carnal," he murmured, stretching out his hand towards the decanter.

“Mars and Bacchus, rector,” put in Sharpshott jovially; “a venerable combination. How they know everything in these country villages,” he remarked to Madeleine. “It’s like living under a microscope. *Le diable boiteux* is nothing to it.”

“It is my business to know everything,” said the rector, frowning at his wife, the usual recipient of his displeasure. “As a shepherd of souls I should be unfaithful to my stewardship if I did not beware of black sheep straying within the fold.”

Sharpshott looked at his host and grinned.

“But how my maid has become acquainted with the man is what I do not understand,” said Mrs. Abington, harking back to the point, and appealing to Mrs. Jordan. Her mind was slow to receive new ideas, but when she got hold of one she followed it up pertinaciously.

“Well, all I can say,” spitefully rejoined Mrs. Jordan, pausing in a raid upon the brandy-cherries, “is that they seemed most intimate, *most* intimate, I assure you. I should never have believed it, if I hadn’t seen them with my own eyes. They were,” lowering her voice to a tragic whisper, “kissing;

actually kissing; and in the park too. Most indecent I call it."

She drew herself up triumphantly, and looked round the table, as much as to say, "What do you think of that?"

Goring and Sharpshott laughed outright.

"Well, kissing isn't one of the seven deadly sins," chuckled Sharpshott.

"Probably only a little flirtation," laughed Goring lightly. "Pass the port, rector."

"A sad example for a Christian parish," lamented Mrs. Jordan, pursing up the corners of her loose mouth.

"A foreigner and a papist," sighed the rector. "I always feared, dear Mrs. Abington—" He shook his head with an "I told you so" air.

"I must speak to Julie about it," said Mrs. Abington, in a distressed voice. Goring smothered a yawn; the amiable dissertations of his amiable mother slightly bored him. "I must ask her to explain herself. These sort of intimacies seldom mean any good. And yet I had a most excellent character with her from Lady Waterpark, whom I do not know, it is true, but who wrote.

Dear me, Madeleine, how pale you look! Were you wise, dear, to come down to dinner?"

"You must have walked too far," said Mrs. Jordan. "You were looking so very well when you were calling on us this afternoon. Both Lady Scrawley and myself noticed it."

"It is nothing," said Madeleine, pulling herself together with an effort. She had been pretending to listen to one of Sharpshott's "long-bow" stories of his prowess in the chase. "Really nothing. Pray do not trouble about me. You were telling me, Mr. Sharpshott, that the red deer—"

Madeleine managed to divert attention, and the conversation drifted into other channels. But she had heard enough to confirm her worst suspicions. It was evident the Frenchwoman had lied to her; it was equally evident, to her, that Julie and Dampier were plotting some mischief. These intimate and frequent meetings could mean nothing else. But what was it? How could she prevent it? These were the questions which vexed her brain as she sat listening to Sharpshott's platitudes. Every now and then she would catch Kenneth looking at her solicitously. She had, perforce, to try and smile back at him, though her heart seemed breaking.

But the longest dinner comes to an end. At last Mrs. Abington gave the signal to retire. Madeleine hailed it with a sigh of relief.

When the men came into the drawing-room later, there was the usual request for "a little music." A "little music" after dinner had many uses. It helps digestion, and it may serve as a cover for conversation, a stimulant to it, or an escape from it. In this instance the last consideration weighed most, for the rector and his wife were apt to pall after a prolonged sitting, and human endurance—even of one's host—has its limits.

Madeleine might have pleaded fatigue, but she did not. To have done so would have been to attract the attention which she wished to avoid. She sat down to the piano and began to play a brilliant cavatina by Raff; she played it through without a false note, difficult though it was—the more difficult the better, for it kept her thoughts employed. Then, without waiting for the conventional "Thank you—very nice," which would have been murmured just the same if it had been a most ear-torturing performance, she dashed off into something else.

The rector had folded his plump hands across his

capacious waistcoat, and was gazing solemnly at the ceiling like a ruminating ox ; and Mrs. Jordan, unable to contain herself any longer, was pouring into Mrs. Abington's ear in a subdued murmur the story of Jemima's wrong-doing. The time was passing by. It was nearly eleven already. In another half hour at the most Madeleine would be alone, free to think—to think—and to weep.

“ Madeleine, what ails you to-night—is there anything wrong ? ”

It was Goring, who had escaped from Sharpshott, and crossed to where Madeleine was playing.

“ No,” she said, playing on without looking at him ; “ I’m a little tired, that is all.”

“ Is that all ? ” he asked sceptically. “ I don’t know what is wrong, but there is something different about your playing to-night—a hard brilliancy I have never heard before. Love hears things, you know, to which other ears are deaf.”

“ Even love may sometimes be deceived,” she answered.

He looked at her thoughtfully, and put his hand upon her arm.

“ Don’t play any more to-night,” he said. “ You

are tired, over-wrought; I can hear it in your voice."

She caught her breath.

"You are right," she said unsteadily; "I—I—am not myself. I am weak just where I should be strong. I have a foreboding that something evil will happen, and yet—"

"A foolish fancy," he said, smiling, "which I will falsify. What, Madeleine! do you doubt me?"

"No," she said quickly, "not that, never that; only, we are weak, and fate is strong. It is the heart which loves the most which doubts the most. The noblest love is self-sacrifice for the happiness of the object loved. I love you so Kenneth dear, that I would sacrifice everything, leave everything—even leave you, if it were best for you."

"Come—come," he said reassuringly, "surely you and I need not contemplate such a possibility; all our sorrows and sacrifices lie behind us. Love does not need sacrifice. And as for anything in the future—whatever it may be, we will bear it together."

There was a movement among the little group by the fire.

“ Well, we really must be going,” said the rector. “ It is eleven o’clock, I declare. Are you ready, Maria? Good-night, Mrs. Abington, and thank you so much for a charming evening. Thank you so much for your delightful music, Mrs. Dampier. How tired you look. Good-night.”

In the general leave-taking Madeleine slipped away.

“ She has hooked him, Septimus; there’s not a doubt about that,” exclaimed Mrs. Jordan, as, cloaked and galoshed, she was trudging homewards across the park. “ Did you notice how they were whispering and philandering behind the piano? They’ll be married before the year’s out, you mark my words, and then we shall see what will happen next.”

“ We are in the Lord’s hands, Maria,” said the rector piously. “ I hope you did not forget to tell Jane to keep the kettle boiling. The night is chilly, and I must take a little something for my stomach’s sake.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN Madeleine reached her room her fortitude gave way. She flung herself on her knees before the bed. "God help me," she prayed.

The struggle was a fierce one—she hesitated at the parting of the ways. Which should she choose? Love, joy, happiness were all one way; loneliness, misery, hardship all the other. A voice was busy whispering in her ear. What tie of love, honour, or duty bound her to the man who was called her husband? None. But her love for Goring had wound itself around her heart. To give it up would be worse than to give up life itself; for with it would go all that made life worth the living. She knew that Goring would not let her leave him, if he could help it. She knew that she had but to say the word, and he would cast everything aside for her sake. And if they loved each other, what else mattered? All her life long she

had yearned for love. Now that love had come, should she dash the cup of happiness from her lips ?

The temptation arose, and took her by the throat ; she wrestled with it in dumb, impotent pain.

“ Dear God,” she prayed again, with dry lips, “ help me to do right.”

The help came. It generally does come if one only wills hard enough, and if the decision rests with oneself. She battled with her heart, battled and overcame.

When she arose it seemed to her that the path of right lay before her, in a light clear and strong. She was calm now, weak and exhausted, but firm in the consciousness of what she believed to be the right course. She must leave Burwood, and leave at once. She could not trust herself ; she could not trust him. She thought it all out rapidly, with the sudden decision which is apt to be borne of great emergency.

She would go away quietly without leaving a trace behind her to show whither she had gone. There was no other way. She could not run the gauntlet of Kenneth’s pleading when he knew the truth ; she could not wear the mask which the con-

cealment of the truth entailed ; and, over and above all, there was the dominant fear of what her husband might do. The thought of him filled her with terror ; her only safety lay in flight.

In her present mood, to think was to act.

She changed her dress, and began to pack the few things she would need most in a small hand-bag. It would be as much as she could carry, and she was determined to get away from the house with the morning light. In it she also packed her few trinkets, all the money she had in hand, and two photographs, one of her dead child, and one of the man she loved. She did this mechanically, without faltering. When it was done she turned to the hardest task of all, to write a letter to Kenneth. Her hand trembled so much that she could hardly hold the pen. It was like writing her own death warrant :—

“ I know not how to tell you,” she wrote. *“ And yet you must be told. I can never be your wife. I am not free. My husband has come back. He is not dead. I saw him to-day, and spoke with him, in the park. He is the man of whom they were talking at dinner; he is staying here under a*

false name. There is no safety for me here. Do not follow me, do not try to know whither I have gone. It is better that I should fade out of your life, as though I had never been. Kenneth, dear one, I love you so dearly that I only can leave you. Forgive me for having unwittingly done you this wrong. Until to-day I knew not that he lived. That he lives, means the death of our brief happiness. Forgive me, and forget me.

“Madeleine.”

She folded the letter, and addressed it. She also wrote a few lines to Mrs. Abington, to the effect that she had gone away, and would write more fully later on. Meanwhile, Kenneth would tell her all.

When all was done her strength gave way again; she burst into a passion of weeping. The tears brought her some relief. Her preparations were completed now, she could only wait wearily for the morning light. Sleep was out of the question. She blew out the candles, and, wrapping herself round in a dressing-gown, sat down in a low chair before the dying fire.

How long she sat there in her dull misery she

knew not ; the hours wore themselves slowly on into the night. Except for the occasional dropping of ashes on the hearth, everything was still.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a faint sound—a sound like the opening of a window—so faint as to be hardly audible. But Madeleine, with every nerve strung to highest tension, heard it. She listened intently. Surely she could not have been mistaken ? No, there was the noise again. It seemed to come from the windows of the drawing-room immediately beneath.

She crept to her window, and, pulling aside a little of the blind, looked out. It was a dark night, and the moon was obscured by drifting clouds. She could see nothing. The noise had ceased ; everything was still. “Perhaps it was my imagination,” she thought to herself ; “possibly a keeper or a policeman !” She went back to the fire again, and resumed the current of her sad thoughts.

The minutes passed by. She had drifted into that half comatose condition which comes to those who are unable to sleep, when upon her ear there came another sound—a different one this time, but none the less distinct, a stealthy footstep, followed

by a low whisper in the corridor just outside her door.

She sprang up in a moment with quickened heart-beat, every nerve throbbing with terror, and listened. The steps moved on stealthily in the direction of Mrs. Abington's room ; she could hear them ever so faintly, but still distinctly.

Little links pieced themselves together in her chain of memory ; the truth revealed itself to her like a flash. Mrs. Abington's diamonds . . . she had worn some of them that night . . . the French maid . . . her husband . . . their meetings. This, then, was what had brought him to Burwood.

A mingled feeling rushed over her, half terror, half shame for him, that he had fallen so low as this. She paused a moment irresolutely. Then, bracing up her courage, she crept noiselessly to the door, opened it gently, and peered out. There was no one to be seen, but at the far end of the corridor from the room next to that occupied by Mrs. Abington there came the glimmer of a faint light.

In an instant Madeleine's mind was made up. She must arouse Kenneth, and give the alarm without delay. To appeal, to seek to dissuade,

would be vain. Matters had gone too far for that. She knew his room—it was almost at the other end of the house.

Acting on the impulse, swift as thought she sped with noiseless steps along the corridor, feeling rather than seeing her way in the darkness. She ran down a small flight of steps, then up some others, for the house was on uneven levels, and rambling as such houses often are—until at last she reached, all breathless, Goring's door.

She had to knock more than once, for, blessed with a good conscience and a sound digestion, he slept the sleep of the just. But the instant he heard a knock he sprang out of bed, and, throwing on a dressing-gown, opened the door.

“Madeleine!” he exclaimed, looking in astonishment at the white and trembling figure before him.

“Quick—quick,” she whispered. “There is someone—in Mrs. Abington’s dressing-room—a burglar.”

He needed no second warning. “One moment,” he said, stepping back into the room. He huddled on some clothes, and in less than a minute appeared again with his pistols.

The sight of them recalled her to a sense of danger. "No, no!" she said shudderingly, grasping him by the arm, "do not go alone—there may be more than one—call the servants—"

He put her on one side with a reassuring smile. His pulses leaped at the prospect of an adventure. There was a thrill of excitement about it.

"Stay here, Madeleine," he said. "Don't be frightened. It's all right. You will be safe here. I shall be back directly."

He ran off in the direction of Mrs. Abington's room.

Madeleine followed him, almost fainting with terror; not for her sake, but for his. She remembered what a desperate man Dampier was when driven to bay, what a dead shot he was. And already she bitterly blamed herself for having given the alarm. Suppose he had taken the diamonds—what matter? What were all the diamonds of Golconda beside Kenneth's safety? At the top of the stairs there was an alarm bell, which she knew communicated with the servants' part of the house. She seized the bell rope with both hands, and pulled it with all her might.

The clanging broke harshly on the silence. An

instant later there was a sound of opening doors and running feet. The servants were aroused.

The noise had disturbed the others as well. At the first note of alarm, a man with a mask across the upper part of his face, and a case under his arm, came running out of the room next to that occupied by Mrs. Abington. His evident intention was to make for the stairs, and escape by the way he had entered. Julie, fully dressed, appeared at the top of the stairs. In the middle of the corridor Dampier came full tilt upon Goring.

“No, no! you don’t, my man,” said Goring, not recognising Dampier with his mask on, and blocking the way as he endeavoured to bolt past. “Come, give that up.”

“Stand out of my way,” cried the other, “and let me pass, or by ——, I’ll make you.”

He whipped out a revolver. In a moment they would have closed in a struggle. There was a sound of many feet, and Madeleine, followed at a distance by the servants, came running down the corridor.

No sooner did Dampier see her than, dodging Goring, he pointed his pistol at her.

“Ah!” he cried, with an oath, “it is you who

have blown on me, is it ? You she-devil ! Take that."

There was a flash, a report, a cry. She fell back against the wall. It was the work of an instant.

" You damned scoundrel !" cried Goring in an agony of rage and horror. " You have killed her—Madeleine !" He turned towards where she was.

This momentary diversion was all that Dampier wanted. He had no intention of hurting Madeleine; murder was not his game, at least not her murder; the chamber was loaded blank which he had discharged. The corridor in front of him was now blocked with servants; to escape that way was impossible. Quick as thought he doubled, and rushing into the room he had just come out of, he threw up the window sash and jumped down to some leads some four or five feet below.

Goring would have followed at once, but Madeleine clung to him and implored him to remain. She had fallen back through sheer physical terror. As soon as he could soothe her, Goring left her to the horror-stricken women-servants, who had now arrived upon the scene, and with two of the footmen started in pursuit.

But Dampier had gained on them considerably by

the delay. The house, like many houses of the kind, had a wide parapet of stone. He had managed to make his way along this from the leads, had gained the sloping roof of the conservatory, and thence dropped to the ground. At least they imagined that he must have done this, for there was not a trace of him to be seen, though the jewel-case was picked up on the leads. The grounds were searched to no avail. He had evidently made good his escape.

After an hour's fruitless quest, Goring returned to the house. He told one of the grooms to saddle a horse and give information to the police in the county-town some ten miles distant. The village constable arrived upon the scene when the search was over, and delivered himself of portentous theories as to how the fugitive had compassed his escape.

There was really nothing more to be done. Goring hurried to Madeleine's room to learn how she was. He found a group of women-servants huddled outside the door like a flock of frightened sheep. From the babel of tongues he gathered that Mrs. Dampier, after he left, had fainted from terror, that Mrs. Abington was very much upset, and that

Julie was nowhere to be found. She had disappeared also.

Goring went to reassure his mother, no easy task, and then came back to inquire after Madeleine again. She had recovered consciousness to some extent, but it was thought better not to disturb her.

“I found this letter, Sir Kenneth, on Mrs. Dampier’s writing-table,” said the housekeeper, handing it to him with a puzzled look. “I suppose Mrs. Dampier meant it to be given you. I haven’t asked her; she’s hardly in a fit state to be questioned.

Goring took the note absently; he did not attach much importance to it. He had several orders to give to the servants. After quiet was restored he went down to the library; he determined to sit up until the morning. Sleep was out of the question. It was not until he was alone that he remembered the letter in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“WILL nothing turn you?” he said — “nothing?”

Madeleine shook her head mutely. To what purpose was all this? So far each word had stung the other and made the struggle harder. Goring took up his walk again and paced up and down the room, trying to think. She looked at him helplessly. They were in the library. The white busts on the top of the book-shelves looked down on them stolidly. It seemed to Madeleine’s distorted sense that they frowned upon her in the fading light. It was the evening of the next day. All day long the shadow had brooded. The servants went quietly as though there were death in the house. Mrs. Abington was prostrated in her room. Madeleine had told her all, and had come out of the interview confirmed and strengthened in her resolution. She was leaving Burwood on the morrow.

Nothing Goring could say, no reasoning, no pleading, could alter her resolve.

Suddenly he halted in front of her again.

“I cannot let you go,” he said.

But there was a ring of hopelessness in his voice as he looked at her. She was white and worn, and round her eyes dark shadows lurked. But despite her weakness there was a resistance in her against which he beat himself in vain.

“I must go,” she said hopelessly. A sob sprang up and caught her by the throat. “Kenneth, why did you insist upon seeing me? It only makes things harder—I must go away—I could not remain here after—after what has happened. In your calmer moments you will see that as well as I. We must say good-bye.”

“But not altogether, not finally.”

“It must be final,” she said, in a low voice. “It is the only right course—the only course.”

“Another course shall be found,” he said doggedly. “I will move heaven and earth to find one. There can be no law, divine or human, which binds you to this man. You must sue for a divorce.”

“You forget his position. There can be no

divorce. To move would be to betray him. The law thinks him dead."

"The law thinks so no longer. The Scotland Yard people have been here to-day. They have put two and two together, and they have an inkling of the truth. They have been on his track for a long time; he is wanted on more charges than one. I tried to throw dust in their eyes. I will try to hush it up as much as I can. He has dodged them now, but it will be a miracle if he gets clear in the long run."

She turned pale at the mental picture his words conjured up. She was the wife of this man—she bore his name.

"And then—I believe you would get your divorce."

"There has been no cruelty—no physical cruelty," she said wearily.

"But he deserted you. It will be easy to prove the rest."

"We separated by mutual consent. There was no desertion. But what matter these legal quibbles? I could not—those courts are for women who have no sense of shame. You forget that marriage is sacramental, indissoluble."

“That is the Roman Catholic view,” he said, “and even that church gives dispensations. The daughter of the Duke of Hamilton, and the Prince of Monaco, were allowed to dissolve their marriage vows. Yours is a harder case than theirs. The Church of England, your church—our church—allows the remarriage of the innocent party in a divorce for adultery.”

She shook her head.

“I have not so learned its teaching. In God’s law there is no divorce.”

“With one exception,” he said quickly. “Of that exception you can surely avail yourself; his infidelities in India were notorious. The other difficulty we could get over.”

“At this distance of time his infidelities would be difficult to prove,” she said. “But what avails it? The law courts did not bind us; they cannot loose us. I doubt if they could, even by their man-made law, for a husband’s unfaithfulness is not alone sufficient for a wife to divorce him. But what is the good of all this? The man we thought dead is alive, and I vowed myself to him before the altar until death should part us. That is the one stupendous fact—all the talking in the world will not alter it. At least, it is providential that

we were warned in time. A month or two later—”

She turned away to the window that he might not see the agony in her face. The day was drawing to a close. The sun had gone down in a crimson glory, but the light still lingered over the woods, flecking the elms, burnishing the beeches, turning the leaves of the maples red as blood. This was the last time she would look upon this fair home—she who so soon was to have been its mistress. Behind the woods the hills rose grey and misty in the evening shadows. It was beyond the hills that her pathway was—out into the world again, alone, always alone, a whole life long. For her there was no home, no good man’s love.

She turned away with a sudden spasm of pain.

“Kenneth,” she said wildly, “what is the use of prolonging this? Let me go—let me go!”

He caught her to his breast and soothed her with loving words. “I cannot let you go,” he whispered. “There must be a way out of it. Let us reason together—let us consider.”

“There is nothing to consider. So long as this man lives I can never be your wife. All the reasoning in the world will not alter that.”

“Dear one,” he said, “you are already my wife in my sight—in the sight of God. So long as you live I will have none other. That night—do you remember?—when we plighted our troth beneath the stars, in intention we were wed. Why let this man come between us? Long ago he forfeited the right the law gave him. If the law cannot free you I claim you by a higher right than any the law can give, the right of our love.”

She lay against his breast, passive. Ah! if his reasoning were only true. A sense of impotence stole over her. Of what avail was it to struggle? What had she done that she should always be sacrificed? For the moment her senses were lulled to sleep. She felt like one in a dream. She heard his voice saying:

“Divorce or no divorce, we are bound to one another. We love one another. What does all else matter? I will do what you will—order my life for you. I will do what you please, go where you please—in all things devote my life to yours. In some far-off land, where no one knows us, we can

forget everything, and remember only that we love one another."

"*Where no one knows us.*"

That roused her. She drew herself from him a little way.

"I cannot—I cannot," she said almost below her breath. "Kenneth, don't tempt me to do wrong."

"There is no wrong," he said stoutly; "let priests and lawyers say what they may."

"I cannot," she said again; "for your sake I cannot. It would wreck your future. Ah! there is fate in this—I feared that my love would bring you shame and sorrow. I told you so before he came. But I never dreamt it would be like this."

"I care nothing for the future," he said, "unless you share it; my life will be a wreck without you."

"And there is someone else," she continued. "Your mother—it would break her heart. You have your duty to her; she is old and ailing. She trusts me. I have promised her. I cannot."

He turned away and bit his lip.

“A man will leave father and mother to cleave to the woman he loves ; that is the everlasting law. As for my mother—she is naturally upset just now. By-and-by she would come round to the inevitable, and see things in a clearer light.”

Madeleine was silent. Silence was the better quality. He caught her hands in his.

“I can only plead my love,” he went on unsteadily ; “no other consideration would weigh with you ; I know that. Nor need it ; whatever happens, you will never know want again.” She shook her head with a quick gesture of dissent ; she could not touch his money. But he did not notice ; he went on eagerly : “And, besides, ours is a hard case, a terribly hard one. The world would judge us leniently. He might sue for a divorce if—if it were worth his while—and then we could be married.”

She flushed, and drew her hands away.

“That is unworthy of you. You misjudge me—you misjudge yourself,” she said. “If this thing be wrong, all the legal licence in the world would not make it right.”

“You cannot love me as I love you !” he cried,

losing his control, as he felt the ground slipping inch by inch from under his feet. "Am I nothing to you? Is my love nothing that you can weigh it in the balance against a scruple?"

She looked at him sorrowfully.

"Kenneth, dear one, it is because I love you so dearly—so dearly, that I must leave you. Can you not see what it costs me to say this?"

"Forgive me," he said, with quick penitence. "I am not myself; I hardly know what I am saying. I ought not to have suggested that you should consent to this subterfuge. I did not realise what a sacrifice I was asking. I forgot. It is always the woman who is blamed in the eyes of the world."

"The world!" she echoed. "What the world may think matters nothing to me. I have urged many objections and you have met them; but there is one more, one which weighs with me above and beyond all else, my duty towards my conscience. Is this thing wrong in God's sight? A voice within me whispers that it is. Not even your love would compensate me for doing what I thought to be wrong. Perhaps in time I may come to see things differently. Then I will say to you,

‘Come.’ I do not know—I do not think so. But it has all been so sudden, we are hardly fit, either of us, to reason calmly now.”

“And in the meantime what will you do ?” he asked. “You will not let me help you. You are too weak to battle with this brutal world—alone !”

A light broke over her face.

“I shall not be alone if I strive to do right,” she said, in a low voice. “God will help me.”

He threw himself into a chair with a despairing gesture, and covered his face with his hands.

Madeleine stood watching him, her head silhouetted against the window. The light without warred with the light within ; the shadows stole over the room. The clock ticked out three minutes. The whole tragedy of her life seemed to crowd itself into those three minutes. She made a step towards him, and then paused. Her soul cried out within her, “Stay with him—he loves you—he needs you—stay with him.”

If he had looked up then. But he did not.

With a violent effort she stifled down nature’s

voice within her. She laid her hand on his bowed head with a gesture of benediction.

“God keep you, Kenneth. God keep you, now and always.”

When he looked up she was gone.

END OF VOL. II.

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